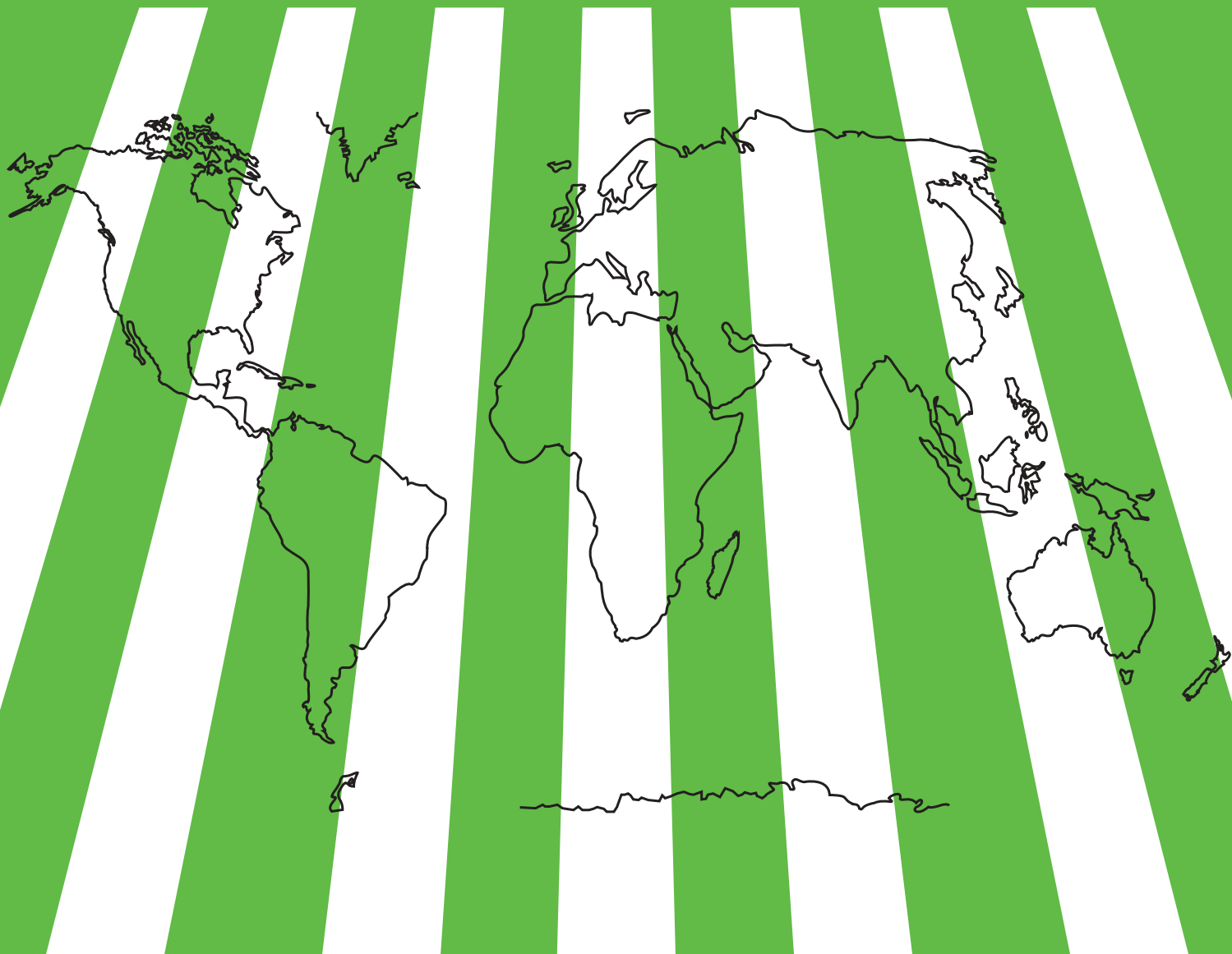


Lux Mundi

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March/June 2004



Published quarterly by the
Committee on Relations with
Churches Abroad of
The Reformed Churches in
the Netherlands

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Editorial

During this last year, the ecclesiastical map of the Netherlands has changed dramatically. In part, this has to do with the fusion of three Protestant churches to form the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN: Protestant Church in the Netherlands).

To begin with, on May 1st the *Hersteld Hervormde Kerk* came into existence (see <http://www.hersteldhervormdekerk.nl>). It is not a new church but 'a collection of what was left behind' when the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* was taken up into the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN). Rev. D. Heemskerck, chairman of the first *Hersteld Hervormde* synod, called the formation of the PKN 'the greatest secession in history'. After the temporary synod on May 1st, the approximately 120 congregations, currently organised under 7 classes, met each other for the first synod in Soest on June 19th.

Noticeable in these churches is that unlike Dort, they maintain the 1951 Church order of a 'national church' with the churches as local departments. But, so they say, it is 'not a plural, unreformed foundation'. They are not yet so far that they are able to think about merging with other churches which have left the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* at an earlier date for the reformed doctrine, nor do they expect immediate approaches from within these churches.

On the same day, a number of *Gereformeerde Kerken* remained behind. They call themselves the *Voortgezette Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (see <http://www.voortzettinggkn.nl>). Eight churches were represented at their synod on May 8th in Garderen, which have since been organised into two classes. The report about the synod in the press, stated that these churches wish to maintain spiritual unity and wish to seek union with all who know themselves to be bound to the reformed confession. This means that they also wish to maintain links with kindred churches within the PKN.

And then, in this last year, the first congregations have been established which have withdrawn themselves from the *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Nederland*, the churches which publish *Lux Mundi*. Now that the Acts of the General Synod of Zuidhorn (2002-3) have been ratified by most churches, the moment of decision has arrived. In approximately ten places, services are being held. Already two or three churches have been instituted (see <http://www.gereformeerd.info>). No synod has yet taken place as far as we know.

We see a large dynamic and in this, signs of hope as well as reasons for sorrow. All this is just in the Netherlands, one mini country. However you judge the issues, to the glory or dishonour of the head of the church, we believe that the love of Christ is active in this. The love which moved Him to Golgotha, drives Him on in his intention to make his bride pure and holy. His resolution determines our hope of a beautiful end product: a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Let this hope bring us so far that we - individual believers, local churches, and church federations - submit our full trust to the way He chooses to achieve this Extreme Make-Over: washing her with water through the word (Eph.5:26-27). The church only rids herself of her wounds and her filth in that ever repeated thorough bath in the Word. The comparison with 'bathing in water' sounds friendlier, gentler than with a 'sharp sword' that cuts away needless things in the smallest corners of what must be preserved (Heb.4:12-13). But in both cases we are dealing with the Spirit of the love of Christ, the declared enemy of sin and disobedience. In the world where this Holy Spirit lives, sin and decay cannot be maintained, and He who in genuine faith holds on to the Lord Jesus Christ, will not be lost.

From the editorial staff

Delayed

Do you know the feeling? You are standing at the airport and on the little television screen you read: DELAYED. Not nice. Annoying. Above this piece you see it too : DELAYED. And if you readers at home, or overseas, think: annoying, we, as editorial staff, share the same feeling. Personnel problems in the number of people as much as in time, have led to a greatly delayed publication of this magazine. We offer our excuses for this. If it is God's will, the second combined issue for 2004 shall appear around about the turn of the year. As from next year, we hope to get back to schedule.

Thanks

Year in and year out, Mr and Mrs Klamer-Rietkerk have dedicated themselves to the appearance of this magazine. Now you will miss their names on the inside cover. This is the last edition for which they administer the postage and membership records. On behalf of the editorial staff and all readers who thanks to their efforts, have received this magazine, we would like to thank them most heartily for the dedication and enthusiasm with which they have done this work. God bless you both.

Have the Reformed Churches become false churches?

In the year 2003, people began to break away from the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (the Reformed Churches (Liberated)) in the Netherlands. This process is still going on. In this review we will hear two voices. The one tries to review the whole process, the other has listened to the information which has been given by concerned brethren. Both also give an evaluation of the objections which are supposed to justify the separation.



The cover of the Handbook, published by Print Media BV, Bedum

Objections

“For quite some time there has been talk of organised concern in our churches. People do not agree with a number of changes which have been introduced in the course of time. The concern is not that things are happening differently, but especially, for example, that the ideas of the hymn writers in the new hymn book have entered the churches along with their hymns. The Synod of Zuidhorn was overwhelmed by a mass of objections about this and other issues. In only a few cases, these were met.

Alongside the hymn question, the decision about Sunday also played a large part. That was not a doctrinal decision in the strict sense of the word, more a statement made on a local issue. But the effect of this statement reached all the churches. By not making a statement, because on this point there has always been a difference of opinion, then, in the eyes of the objectors, the synod makes a statement anyway. They would have preferred to see that the synod made a statement saying that keeping the Sabbath in these times means observing the Sunday. To be sure, the deputies dealing

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with ‘the fourth commandment and the Sunday’, are still busy to inform the churches, but the concerned parties do not want to wait for this. The case is clear for them: you are not allowed to work on Sunday because the fourth commandment says this about the Sabbath.

The question of authority of Scripture also plays a role, and on different points too. First of all, in the search for church unity. Is it not true that there are massive differences between us and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, which first ought to be sorted out? Prof. dr. B.J. Oosterhoff’s view of Genesis 2 and 3 used to play a part; now the discussion is more about dr. B. Loonstra’s ideas. Dr. Loonstra has written various books about handling the Bible. What to do in approaching the Christelijke Gereformeerden with the statement of the reformed Synod of Assen-1926 which said that according to the evident intention of the story the snake etc were realities perceptible by the senses? The concerned parties resist the increasing church unity with these churches.

Secondly, the authority of the Bible plays a role in the assessment of the report about divorce and remarriage submitted to the Synod of Zuidhorn. The impression has been given that in this report, the concrete commands of God have been exchanged for a sort of situation ethics, whereby God’s will only becomes clear from the circumstances. Thinking and speaking on the basis of the style of the kingdom, is viewed by them as a great danger. If their interpretation was right, it really would be.

In the background, and that is the third point of grievance, objections to the publication of *Woord op Schrift* from Kampen, play a part. In this book there are indeed things which are unusual for the Reformed world. It touches the question of whether in the

Rev. J.H. Kuiper, editor of the article in the Reformed Church Handbook.



Bible there is also imagery which you do not directly recognise as such, and what consequences this has for the explanation. On this point, objections have been lodged with the board of trustees of the Theological University which have been rejected. Later there also was a study day in Kampen on this subject and in the weekly *De Reformatie*, Rev. A.L.Th. de Bruijne has also clarified and corrected the issues.

In fact it is all about the accusation of Scripture-criticism within the churches. In the *Reformanda* magazine, many columns have been dedicated to this very issue. A point which touches the heart of the church. Words like "far reaching Scripture-criticism" have been heard in this case. Next to this there are other points but this is really the heart of the matter (...)

Call to reformation

In January of 2003, the *Reformanda* society, working together with the national 'Workgroup for Information about Church developments', produced a brochure, in which the difficulties were set out. This brochure was accompanied by a model letter which concerned brothers and sisters could send to their church councils, wherein, with argumentation, they requested for the decisions of the Synod of Zuidhorn not to be ratified. Shortly afterwards a Call to Reformation followed in various papers with the same intent.

The church councils were next to busy themselves with the decisions of Zuidhorn. Do you consider these as decisive and binding or not? Many church councils are still busy with this ratification process, others are already finished.

In some places this led to a breakaway, which was completely modelled on the Liberation of 1944. Model 'Acts of Liberation' can be downloaded with ease. The magazine *Reformanda* also clearly chose for this course. While it was a little uncertain at the start of the year, the *Reformanda* society chose to follow the magazine in its call to "free yourself from these wrong decisions and do not wait for the next synod". If someone does not follow, he is a member of a church which is no longer a true church.

The first breakaway took place in Berkel and Rodenrijs in September. Bergschenhoek followed as did Wezep. One family in Venlo also followed this movement; later, Veenendaal and Zwolle; Zwiindrecht too. A national meeting took place in Zwolle to stimulate this. Congregations have been instituted in Berkel and in Zwolle up to now. In 2003, we are talking of about 300 brothers and sisters who have taken this step. Up until now, one minister has gone with them, the retired minister Rev. P. van Gulp. The process is still taking shape. We have to wait to see what the new year brings.

Reactions

Reactions to this have been varied. Rev P. Groenberg reported in the church magazine for the mid and south Netherlands, that discussions were taking place here and there between concerned brothers and sisters and the others, and that discussions were sometimes very emotional. This gives encouragement. In the press, a sort of stalemate seems to have been reached. All the points raised have been clearly

refuted, because, for example, they do not accurately represent the case.

I will give one example. Even at the Synod of Zuidhorn, the alleged contrast between obedience to God's commandments and the style of the kingdom came up. Alleged, because this contrast does not exist. The latter takes the first further and goes beyond it. No commandment is set aside. Yet, the accusations of situation ethics remain in circulation. And that in spite of the fact that the churches view the report as a basis for discussion, and as far as policy relating to divorce is concerned, nothing has been changed.

You could ask yourself if you really can hope to progress at this level. Another idea about the church hides behind this: a church which is unequivocal and leaves no room for doubt. This is very evident when the concerned parties choose for the term *Vrijmaking* (Liberation), after the example of 1944; they do so calling on K. Schilder, who, in 1934, when commemorating the Secession of 1834, gave a magnificent speech on the basis of Micah 6:6-8 about the absence of a principle at the Secession. I have to be honest and say it is a puzzle to me how you can then choose for a church which chooses for the one opinion about Sabbath rest with judgement of the other which circulated within the churches, too. For this reason, some have called this separation the opposite of the Liberation of 1944: this is a superscriptural binding. If you want to go further with discussion, then this is what you will have to talk about: what sort of church do we want?

The accusation of Scripture-criticism, makes talking difficult. It is sad to part in this way. For those who remain it is also a trial of faith. It is important not to cover up the pain with a superficial word. It hurts when a number of brothers and sisters say that the scriptural teaching is not safe with those who remain and that thus one of the first things which plays a role in a safe church, is no longer recognisable for them."

These were the observations of the editor of the *Handboek*. The chief editor of the reformed weekly *De Reformatie*, G.J. van Middelkoop, also looks back. He has attended meetings and followed the information given. As title for his account, he chooses "Continuing radicalisation".

Disputable advice

"On what grounds do brothers and sisters say farewell or consider saying farewell to the Reformed Churches (liberated)? For clarity sake and for the furthering of the brotherly discussion, I will have a look at a number of points. Here I am using the information given by the National Workgroup at meetings regarding certain challenged decisions of the synod. There, I heard much which was disputable, and behind what was said, I sensed suspicion and mistrust. Because of this, things are viewed more seriously than they are, or distorted into something which they absolutely are not. And in this way you end up with an uncharitable explanation of what you hear and read.

If you are part of a discussion during a Bible study evening, you are likely to hear somebody say something which makes you raise an eyebrow. You join the discussion



The Synod of Zuidhorn was overwhelmed by a mass of objections about this and other issues. In only a few cases, these were met. (photo Tjerk: de Vries)

and you ask what is meant. And if necessary you try to spare the person from thinking wrongly, and to make him change his mind. But I missed this approach in the advice. Just about everything was explained negatively and seen as proof that the other side wants to go in another direction. In this way you do no justice to people and things, standpoints and intentions. When we are engaged in a spiritual struggle, then we must be careful how we do that. Are we really using weapons of light and righteousness?

On the first evening, five *hymns* were reviewed. The spokesman talked about the first hymn, the baptism song and a number of other songs for communion. What he said about Hymn 1 of the *Liedboek voor de kerken* gave food for thought. In Hymn 335, to be sung at a child's baptism, he saw heresies which you do not need to see if the song is sung after the reading of the form for the baptism. And in what he had to say about the communion hymns (Hymns 356, 357, 358, 360), he went very far; you really do not immediately need to read Lutheran or Roman Catholic aspects into it. You can also read them in the light of article 35 of the Belgic Confession, in which the meaning of 'this is my body' and so on, is represented very biblically and where, at the same time, the mystery of the communion of the sign and the issue to which it points, is indicated without both things being identified.

Next, it was the turn of Scripture criticism and the seventh commandment. The speaker painted a picture which was absolutely untrue. Careful listening to what Rev. De Bruijne brought to the forefront about what the Lord expects to see in our lives, generally and with regard to divorce, gives a totally different view of things. De Bruijne does absolutely not plead for the law to be pushed to the back. He says, that, alongside the law, other things are decisive in how we act: the Sermon on the Mount, Biblical examples in history and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. How to act is not something you can simply look up in a book with rules; consulting one another in the church we will have to test and approve what God's will is, what is good, pleasing and perfect in certain, concrete examples - what is consistent with his law, the sermon on the Mount and what God has otherwise revealed. This approach we have yet to think about together, but if you leave out the fundamental affiliation to the Scriptures you make a big mistake, and you misguide others.

A third point was the *Sunday rest*. The synod made a statement about a comment made in a sermon about the third commandment. The synod did not deny that the Sunday is a day of rest. The Synods of Leusden-1999 and Zuidhorn-2002/3 did really not change the situation since the Synod of Dordrecht-1618/1619. This synod stated that the seventh day rest was something ceremonial and that after

dispensing with the Jewish Sabbath, the Christians must dutifully observe the Sunday. In his speech, the speaker did no justice to what is regarded as ceremonial, while that is very important in avoiding the confusion which has come into existence since the last synod decisions.

A later meeting dealt with the talks with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. The speaker gave a broad overview of events surrounding the *Vereniging* of 1892, when the churches of *Afscheiding* (1834) and *Doleantie* (1886) united. They had a far reaching point of difference about the events past : the principle of the *Afscheiding* (Secession) was that the *Hervormde Kerk* should be left because she, according to the standard of the Belgic Confession, was no longer a true church, but the *Dolerenden* saw this differently. Nevertheless, they agreed that one could no longer stay within the *Hervormde Kerk*. The basis for their fusion was not in the judgement of positions in the past but in their shared confession today and in the future. A few *afgescheiden* churches protested and continued as *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. Their chief objection was that a number of ministers did not preach according to reformed doctrine (here they thought of Kuyper and his followers).

The speaker argued that the churches had been completely right to decline these objections. For this reason, he characterised the choice of a few *Christelijke Gereformeerde* congregations as obstinacy, which we still must condemn as such, today. He saw this wilfulness also in certain unfortunate practices of the Christian Reformed Church and especially in their way of dealing with the opinions of the late Professor Oosterhoff, which also raised eyebrows amongst us. That the *Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt)* ever embarked on talks with them and now despite those difficulties are willing to federate with them, shows, according to him, that they too, are going a wilful way.

This speech was too positive about the *Vereniging* (which was surrounded by great differences and concerns), and too negative about the present (where existing differences should not block entering the future together on a good basis). The speaker's valuation requires reconsideration, thus. This is also true concerning the difficulties with the standpoints of some theologians within the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. In 1892, it was not the peculiar opinions of distrusted theologians which were decisive, but the official statements of the churches. The same principle must be valid now, too.

General discontent

This is what has been mentioned at official information evenings by 'concerned people'. Of course, more can be said, but you can assume that the core of the problems is presented as such. And then the conclusion must be, that this is not convincing. In the discussion with concerned parties, the problems shift quite frequently. You can rightly point one thing out but then there is still concern about something else. This does not make for easy discussion. Especially when we shift from concrete points like synod decisions to less tangible issues like a general discontent about the way things are going in the churches. And when then, incidents or particular comments are seized upon as



'Vrijmaking' en verder ('Liberation' and thereafter), the article by G.J. van Middelkoop in 'De Reformatie'

symptoms of erosion. Even if this should be the case, then these constitute no more reason to address all the churches as did the opinions of Kuyper in 1892, and certainly no desperate reason to leave the *Gereformeerde Kerken*.

Dr. van Gurp wrote comprehensively in this way about something our Professor De Ruijter named as his personal view of the spiritual climate in the churches, at a conference in Kampen. That his words raise questions is understandable. That his speech is taken as a plea to say farewell to the attachment with the Reformed confessions and thus from the Reformed character of the church, is something else. Was he really talking about a stuffy atmosphere and did he demonstrate aversion to reformed life since the *Vrijmaking*? Was he really intending to replace the old Reformed answers with today's modern theology? Did he want to take the church apart and take distance from her Reformed character? Careful reading can spare you from these sort of conclusions. To read critically is good, to read more than stated, is not. Especially if you already have difficulties with the writer's line of argument, you must do justice to the argument and to the character of the writer and not make a personal standpoint the general standpoint of 'Kampen'. It is not good that Dr. Van Gurp writes in this way, for in so doing, he gives his readers a wrong view and drives them to break away from the churches."

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- J.H. Kuiper, 'Jaaroverzicht 2003', in: Handboek 2004 van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Bedum: Print Media, 2004, pp. 416-438 (Quote pp. 431-433).
G.J. van Middelkoop, "Vrijmaking' en verder", *De Reformatie* 79 (2003/2004) 385-387 [21st February 2004].

Perfection

What does the Bible say about perfection? This is a fundamental and constantly recurring question in all kinds of talks and discussions. In this article the words 'perfect', 'blameless', and 'innocent' will be discussed.

Perfect, blameless, and innocent: the connection between these words is that nothing is missing, and nothing is wrong. We can use them to speak of God and his deeds but which reformed Christian can say of himself that he is innocent? Before God, nobody is blameless; for man, perfection is out of reach, it is a demand which is too heavy to bear. Nevertheless, these words have not been driven out of the language of the Christian faith.

Without blemish

According to the regulations for sacrifice in the Old Testament, sacrificial animals had to be without defect or blemish. Leviticus 22:17-25 describes what was to be understood by this. A sacrificial animal had to be without defects, such as blindness, broken limbs, wounds, mutilations or skin diseases. A less well formed animal, with, for example, its legs too short, could only be offered as a voluntary sacrifice, not as the fulfilment of a vow previously made.

If somebody sacrificed an animal which did not come up to the requirements, neither the sacrifice nor the giver of it, were accepted with favour, both were rejected. This sort of sacrifice revealed lack of respect for God; it was a sign of contempt (see Mal. 1:6-8, 12-14).

Faithfulness to God and man

Psalms 15 asks the question: who may come into the immediate presence of God? There, the LORD only tolerates him whose walk is blameless (v. 2). The rest of the Psalm indicates that this involves doing what is righteous, speaking the truth, keeping your word and doing no damage to others with a slanderous tongue, defamation, not asking usury when lending money, not accepting a bribe or the like. In dealings with people, you let yourself be guided by God's judgement, by respect for him.

In other texts, other characteristics of the blameless life are mentioned: you make no bad plans, do no violence, are not proud or dishonest, do not get involved with



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Who is innocent...

In the Old Testament the word 'perfect' is used as translation of the word tamim and a number of other words from the same root (tmm). 'Innocent' and 'blameless', however, are usually related to naqi (especially in the expression "innocent blood") or the verb naqa. In the New Testament, 'blameless' and 'perfect' often derive from teleios, the verb teleio'oo and nouns associated with this. From the remaining words which are translated 'blameless' (not 'innocent'), amemptos, amoomos and anegklètos are the most important.



...*"from the herd or flock....it must be without blemish"* (Lev. 22:21)

soothsayers, but you keep God's commands and trust in him (cp. Deut. 18:9-14; Ps. 18:22-24; 84:12f; 101:2-8; 119:1-3; Ezek. 28:15-18). According to the Old Testament, there were various people who lived up to this. Noah was the first of whom something like this is said (Gen. 6:9). The Book of Kings uses a similar sort of wording to refer to King David. He served the Lord with a "fully devoted heart" and did not fail to keep any of God's commandments, except for when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and let Uriah be murdered (see e.g. 1 Kings 3:14; 11:4, 33f, 38; 15:5).

Undeserved calamity

Job was, as the LORD himself said to satan: 'blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil' (Job 1:8; 2:3). For this reason, Job could expect that God would bless and



protect Him (cp. e.g. Deut. 7:9; 1 Kings. 2:2-4; Ps. 1; 128:1-4; Prov. 2:7-8; Is. 33:15f). Instead, God allowed satan to take Job's children, possessions and health. Job's friends suggested, in increasingly stronger terms, that his sinful behaviour was the cause of the calamities. Job maintained before God and men, that he was innocent (Job 9:20f; 27:5; 31; 34:6). That he was not completely free from sin, came to light when he had to withdraw his accusation that God had acted unrighteously (39:34 - 40:9; 42:1-6). Nevertheless, God put Job's friends in the wrong (see esp. 42:7). It was right what Job had said about his innocence - the calamity which overtook him was not because of his own sin. The suggestion his friends made, was contrary to God's own positive testimony about Job in Job 1 and 2. Like Job, various other pious Old Testament characters declare their innocence before God in the Psalms. In this, they are not suggesting that they had never done anything

wrong. This is evident on the basis of Psalm 41. Speaking about one's own innocence (v.12) here, goes together with a recognition of one's own sin (v. 4). The man praying in these and other psalms (e.g. Ps. 7 and 26) is innocent, because, in contrast to many of his fellow people, he honours exclusively the LORD as God, trusts in him and, in his daily life, lets himself be guided by his commandments. If such a person falls short nevertheless, he shows his faithfulness to God by confessing his sins (Ps. 32:1-6). He who lives like this, could expect that the LORD would be faithful to his promise that he would not bring his follower a sudden death, as though he was a godless man (cp. Ps. 26:9-11).

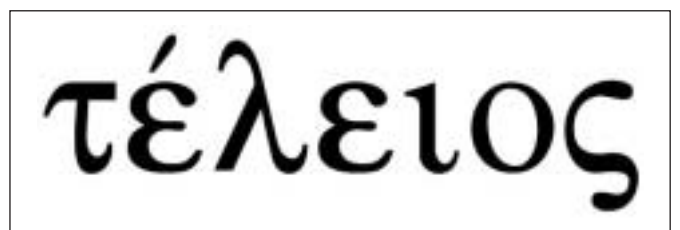
Loving as God loves

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus says: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". Does he demand the impossible requirement of man, to be just as perfect as God? Indeed, Jesus wants his disciples' behaviour to reflect that of God. Moreover, in the Sermon on the Mount he intensifies God's commandments to such an extent that it is almost impossible for man to live up to them (see e.g. Matth. 5:28-30; 39-41). In Matthew 5:48, 'perfect' has a specific meaning. According to verses 43-47, this is about Jesus' disciples loving just as radically as God does. God lets the sun shine on the good as well as on the evil and makes no distinction in this. In this way, Jesus' followers too, must not restrict their demonstration of love to people whom they like. They must also love their enemies. Then, they are behaving as true children of their heavenly Father, and they are perfect as he is perfect.

In 1 John 4:12, John writes, that the love of God must be made perfect in the members of Christ's church. God showed his love by offering his only Son to take away the sin of people who did not love him. Because believers can only live through his love, they must also love one another (1 John 4:7-12; cp. also 2:3-11). Then they live just as Jesus Christ and then they are no longer afraid of his return as judge (4:17f). If there is love for one another in the congregation, the love of God has reached her goal. If not, it is not yet complete.

Beyond reproach

According to Paul's regulations, people in the church who hold an office as overseer, deacon or widow must be blameless (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:7; Tit. 1:6f). In Titus 1:6-9, he goes on to say of overseers or elders, that they must not have more than one wife and must have believing children. They must not cause people to talk by being overbearing or quick tempered, prone to drunkenness, violent nor pursuers of dishonest gain. They must be hospitable, loving what is



good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. They must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught (cp. also 1 Tim. 3:2-12; 5:5-10). It is clear that not everybody confirms to all these standards. Nevertheless, Paul is not looking for ideal people, who do not actually exist, because nobody is perfect. By 'blameless', Paul means as much as 'irreproachable'. He wants to avoid the situation, that he who fulfils a task in the church, be brought into discredit by criticism of his behaviour, through which he cannot function (cp. 'as God's steward' in Tit. 1:7 RSV).

In 1 Corinthians 1:8, Paul uses 'blameless' to characterize the whole congregation on the day of Christ's return. When he returns as judge, Christ will have nothing to say about the members of the church and accuse them of nothing. They owe this to God, through whose faithfulness they will be able to stand firm, and to Jesus Christ, to whom God has bound them. That Jesus Christ ensures himself that the church can appear in this way before Him, can also be seen in Philippians 1:9-11. Paul prays, that on the day of Christ, the congregation will be filled with 'the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ'. This text also shows that this is not something apart from life here and now. The church shall

be pure and blameless then, if her love, insight and sensitivity now abounds more and more. But this too, is something for which Paul prays, and is, thus, a gift of God.

Gift of God

If the Bible speaks of 'blameless', 'innocent' or 'perfect', it rarely means absolute perfection. The import of these words varies according to times and places. When it refers to man, it usually means a radical choice for God. You respect His commandments and you follow Him by loving your neighbour, even if he is your enemy. Even more so than the Old Testament, the New Testament shows that you do not need to try and realise this in your own strength. It is a gift from God, which you receive in unity with Jesus Christ. Church with charisma

1. This is a somewhat shortened version of an article in the Dutch *Woordenboek voor bijbellezers* (Eds. Ab Noordegraaf, Stefan Paas and Arie Zwiep) that will be published by Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer, the Netherlands; ISBN 90 239 1204 7. The Lux Mundi editorial committee has translated it from a pre-publication in *De Reformatie* 78 (2002/2003) 880-882. Copying of this article is not permitted.

In Lux Mundi vol 22 - No 3+4 an article from Dr. Smelik appeared entitled *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: The Old Testament speaks today*. Unfortunately we forgot to mention that this article was a review of a booklet with this title. The details are as follows:

Review of:

C. van Dam, *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: The Old Testament Speaks Today*. Published by: Pro Ecclesia Publishers, 2000 (111 p.). Publisher's address : PO Box 189, Kelmescott Western Australia 6991. This booklet has no ISBN-number.

Church with charisma

In the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, a discussion is afoot about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The one seeks charismatic renewal. The other raises an eyebrow at the Alpha course. As yet there is little detectable direction. But the subject is very much alive. See, for example the link to “the work of the Holy Spirit” at the website of the *Nederlands Dagblad* (www.nd.nl). There is a need to carefully consider what the Bible says. Rev. Gunnink, of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Amersfoort-West, preached two sermons on the theme “how are we a church with charisma?” The sermons are completely available on internet (www.gkv.nl). The message is structured with the use of ten theses. In this issue we publish the first half.

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 14:1-19

Text: Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

1. More Biblical attention for the person and work of the Holy Spirit is enriching.

What is charismatic, in fact? If we talk about charisma, we usually mean: personal aura. You could say that a charismatic congregation is one with much aura or character, but the original meaning of the word charisma is something else. The Greek word charisma originally meant just gift. In the New Testament, faith is called a gift, and charisma, but also acquittal and eternal life (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 5:15-16; 6:23). In this sermon, charisma means a gift from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has given a wide variety of gifts to the church, which help in the building up of the church - the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, the gifts of speaking and service; the gifts of leading and teaching. People who give themselves in the service of the gospel are also gifts of the Spirit, such as apostles, prophets and teachers (1 Cor. 12:28, cp. Eph. 4:11). The New Testament also knew gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, and wonders.

It is the Charismatic Movement which draws new attention for these last gifts. The influence of this movement is not only to be found concentrated in Pentecostal churches but in just about every sort of church. The question this movement puts to the churches is this: have you not forgotten something essential in the building up of the churches? Read the first letter to the Corinthians! The church is standing in the way of the Holy Spirit's work! Especially three gifts have been heavily neglected, according to Charismatics: the gift of healing, the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy.

Let us not be negative, let us not start by turning away. Is it not much better to let yourself be challenged and



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stimulated: what is useful today, according to the Bible, and what not? Let us now first agree together, how enriching it is to become aware who the Spirit of God is and what he wants to mean to you! The Holy Spirit himself is God's greatest gift. His coming at the day of Pentecost meant a new start for the church. Time and again Christ promised to his disciples when he was on earth: later I will go away, but I shall not leave you as orphans. A full Substitute for me will come to you, the Comforter. This is even the reason for a far reaching statement from Jesus: it is better that I go. It must really be a fantastic Replacement, if even Christ says of him: you are better off with him. It is better that I go, because only then can I give you that great present (John 16:7) It is better! We





are better off with God's Spirit at hand than the disciples were with Jesus close at hand.

This is the profit I want to make sure we register - it is good to be amazed about that gift. You always come across such shyness when it comes to the Holy Spirit. We can often imagine much more when it comes to God the Father, we can imagine much more of a person. By God the Son, truly a man, we can also imagine so much more. If I then ask: what does the Holy Spirit mean in your life, and someone says: well, I don't really think about that, is that not poverty? And can this poverty not be found amongst young and old?

By way of contrast, it is so fine to hear this: reverend, I really used to believe, but so much of it was in my brain, just in my head, and there was little in my heart. But just lately, I see that God has come so much closer to me, faith has started to come alive. I am much more aware of the Spirit of Christ who lives in me.

This is the question I want to ask at the same time, is it not offensive for God's Spirit, when in practice, we do not find him so important? Of course, nobody would say it like that out loud but if in your thoughts and actions you give the Spirit of Christ such a minimal place, you should be glad with the room for deepening and enriching which has come, thanks to the new attention for the Holy Spirit.

He wants to live in you, to renew your life, comfort you, you are never again alone, and he always wants to remain with you. Let us not only realise the richness of the gift during Whitsun, but live every day of our journey in dependence upon the Travel Guide in our heart.

Yes, but, somebody might say, is it right to place the Spirit so much in the centre? Is God's Spirit not typically discreetly at work in the background? It is not typical of the Spirit of Christ to want nothing else than to bring you to Christ and keep you there?. It's all about him! This last word is true. Just as God the Father has a plan with you, and is set upon guiding and protecting your life, so that you come to Christ, so too, is God the Holy Spirit working so that you are bound more and more to Christ. He, the Comforter, shall glorify me, said Jesus (John 16:14). But does that mean that the Holy Spirit himself, only wants to stay quietly in the

background? We do not say this of God the Father. God's Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, wants to be worshipped and glorified by us (Nicene Creed). He, the third Godly person of the Trinity, the contact Person who keeps us connected to the Father and the Son, is God's greatest gift to those who believe! How can you cry this down?

2. The gifts of the Spirit cannot be shut up in the time of the New Testament. All these gifts are special, thanks to their special origin.

God's greatest Gift gives out gifts to us now. He is both Gift and Giver, as we sing in the Hymn 'He has come, the Holy Spirit'. Much is said about this in the first letter to the Corinthians. In the Reformed Churches, you often come across a way of thinking, whereby an invisible line is drawn between the New Testament times, and the times which follow. It is said that there were many gifts given in the Apostles' time, but when the Bible was available, some of the gifts which the Spirit wanted to give to us, finished. The 'normal' gifts remained, but the Spirit does not want to give us the so called 'special' gifts anymore. In the special category, we think of speaking in tongues, the gift of healing and the gift of prophecy.

On the other side, you have the Pentecostal Movement which is saying: where does the Bible say that? Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today and unto eternity (Heb. 13:8)! So why would Jesus not want to give us exactly the same gifts through his Spirit? But no, Reformed Christians say in their turn: 'special signs' were just boosters at the start. For example, when a ship is launched you see an enormous splash and troubled water, but once the boat has started sailing, the water settles down again. What an upheaval surrounded the signs which the disciples performed! Now the ship sails calmly onwards, on the motor of the Word alone.

There is something good in this way of thinking, and let us stick to it: that in the Bible, the Word of God's Spirit, we have everything. What God gave as wonders and signs at that time, he does not have to repeat. God confirmed the gospel with signs and wonders long ago, God's Word is truly reliable and finished. We do not need anything more, and if Pentecostals then say: is Jesus not the same today as two thousand years ago, we agree with them wholeheartedly, that is what we hold on to. But it is something else to go from saying he *is* the same to he *does* the same. In many ways God does things differently in the New Testament times than in the Old Testament times. And, after the day of Pentecost, many things happen differently than before. And also after Pentecost, you see God active in many different ways. Rome is not Corinth. You cannot make a mission church the same as a church which exists longer. And our time and culture are different to the times in which the Apostles lived. On that point, I agree with the person who said: today you do not see people dropping dead in the church as Ananias and Sapphira did.

And yet, we want to listen to the Bible! Where does it say that certain gifts were special and temporary and other gifts



This photo shows a part of the ruins of Old Corinth.

were normal and would remain? Paul names nine gifts in the text of 1 Corinthians 12: 1 proclamation of wisdom; 2 conveying of knowledge; 3 (great) faith; 4 gifts of healing; 5 powers to do wonders; 6 prophecy; and along with that 7 the ability to distinguish between what is and is not from the Spirit; 8 speaking in tongues; and with that 9 interpretation of tongues.

I believe that we by distinguishing the so called special gifts from the more normal, and setting them against each other, discredit Paul's words in two ways.

(1) We say: *those normal gifts are just normal*. If somebody says wise words, we call that normal instead of seeing God's Spirit behind those words and saying: thank him! Paul wants to make us glad because of so many good things in the church - if somebody can lead well, or, if someone can present knowledge well, that is something to thank God for. Otherwise we discredit those gifts.

(2) If we say: *the special gifts can not be given anymore*, then we also discredit God's Spirit. Who am I to tell God's Spirit what he can do?

Paul adds: remember, no matter how different the gifts are, it is all about one and the same Spirit who gives those gifts as He wishes (see Heb. 2:4). Paul says nowhere that there are normal gifts which remain and special gifts which will stop. We hear of an thoroughly Reformed professor,

Lucas Lindeboom, at the Theological School in Kampen, that he had the gift of healing. Many people noticed that those whom Rev. Lindeboom visited and prayed with, were healed in unusual ways, against all medical expectation. Many believers and church officers witness that sometimes God intervened in a remarkable way and granted recovery. If I read something like that, must I immediately start haggling, looking glumly, saying: that's not possible? Who am I to say what God's Spirit can and cannot give and do now? We must beware of a sort of reaction way of thinking against believers from Pentecostal circles.

As far as that is concerned, I think the end of Mark 16 is very convincing. Here it says that all sorts of signs shall follow believers, also speaking in tongues. It does not say that these signs shall follow only the apostles, but the believers. Nor is there a time limit given. Yes, that is a promise of God for all times, that God can still do these things. But it does not mean that God will keep doing them. One fellow Bible exegete (Jakob van Bruggen) comments by this text: as the gospel travels round the world, the following signs will travel with the believers, they are signs which guide believing preachers during the advance of the gospel and you could possibly think especially of missionary situations. But that they will only happen in a missionary situation, is not what is written and reduces these things too easily to a-

something-happening-far-away-situation. Above all, I can not keep track of these things. I prefer to be glad about all the gifts which God gives to us here and now, and they are all special.

I see Paul saying emphatically, in Rome and Corinth: people, just be glad with the gifts you are given and handle them well. Not: ah, poor soul, you haven't received this or that gift. He does not write to the church in Rome: you miss some of the gifts Corinth has, go and get them. No, he writes: see what sorts of gift there are in your church and use them in the church to be a church with an aura. Thus, Corinth cannot be a sort of model church for us today.

3. The church in Corinth is no model church.

It sometimes seems as though the charismata (the Greek plural to charisma) as they were given to the unique and very young church - the church existed for just 5 years when Paul wrote this letter - should also by definition be given to all the churches today. There is that "must" element again, instead of that relaxed - Gods Gift and all his gifts thereafter, that will do for you. If God's Spirit wants to give more, yes please. If not, that is good as well, because he himself in Christ, is enough for us.

As far as the gifts are concerned, Corinth was more of a chapter apart within the New Testament than that this one church be a sort of blueprint for the church for today. If, for example, we read the apostle Peter about the gifts of the Spirit, you come no further than two sorts of gifts which he distinguishes: the gifts of the word and the gifts of service. The one can bring the message, the other can cook well. In the Alpha Course, you see these gifts of word and deed, hand in hand (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

It is instructive to also look at the list of gifts in Romans 12:4-8. Paul names six gifts there:

1 prophecy; 2 serving (thus as Peter - word and deed); 3 teaching; 4 encouragement 5 giving or showing mercy; 6 leadership. When you put the list of gifts from the church in Corinth next to the list of gifts of the church in Rome, you can say two things:

(1) The lists of gifts in the New Testament are open. They are not closed lists, as a sort of characteristics that we all should have before it is acceptable.

(2) God gives a church in a certain situation what is necessary. You cannot say: hey, they don't speak in tongues there, thus there is something not quite right. Paul does not say that to Rome. Also further in the New Testament (e.g. in the letters to the seven churches of Revelation), that a gift is missing, for example, the gift of healing, is never reason for a rebuke. Let us praise God's wisdom, which through the Spirit, prepares the churches as he wants. God's Spirit is free in this.

Let us be glad with the gifts which God's Spirit has given to our own church. It can be good in times when people can be disappointed about the state of the church, to make super positive lists, just as Paul did, of what God has given us. Does everything in the church have to remain as it was? Is it wrong to desire more?

4. It is wrong to set 'living from forgiveness' and 'desiring more' (Eph. 5:18) on opposite sides. Which "more" are you searching for?

When the work of the Holy Spirit and desire to experience more of the power of God's Spirit in our lives, are being discussed, you often hear (also lately): let Christ's mercy be enough for us. Is that not what we hold on to - that the forgiveness for every sin is to be found in Christ's blood time and again? Is the choice between *God's grace is enough*, and *you desire more*? No, this is absolutely not the choice! God's Word and the confessions are full of it, we need both the blood (the mercy) and the Spirit of Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism shows these two repeatedly as being inseparable: Christ's work of salvation is the work of his blood AND of his Spirit. Lord's Day 26 shows this inseparable combination, where the expression can be found three times! Lord's Day 44 says: continually pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to be renewed more and more after God's image.

The question is not if you are allowed to desire more, but how you do so! Do you desire more, apart from Christ, or do you pray along with the baptism form: Holy Spirit will you give to me, what Christ has earned for me? True, if Christ is no longer being glorified, if it is all about your kicks, your experience, you at the centre of attention (as in Corinth), then it will go wrong. Or when you think that God's Spirit in this life of all believers will save you from sin and that illness must be to do with having too small a faith.

Rev. Th. J. Havinga, former missionary, wrote, after a visit to Pentecostal churches in Brazil: "in the many services I have visited, I have heard little of the gospel of God's grace for sinners. I have heard all the more of the message of the power of God's Spirit who can change everything here and now, in one go. The prosperity theology has slain and slains her thousands in Brazil". It is good to hear this clear warning. Believe! - and the Spirit will grant you a great life up to and including the amazing appearance of golden teeth. If I read that, I think: poor people, who are promised golden teeth or mountains of gold. But do not be diverted by excesses in Charismatic circles. Now that secularisation is being poured over the world by the lorry load, we need more than ever, to know what it is that God has poured out over us, and there is more necessary, than to reject the excesses of the Pentecostal movement alone.

Because, when desiring more means that you want to focus attention on the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, and in a stronger experience of God's nearness to us, a stronger experience of what we confess, in practising godliness, in a stronger expectation of God's power in our lives, then this is only profit.

And that, while the awareness of God's Spirit in our lives is so necessary, in order to keep going as Christians in our heathen world. The awareness that God's Spirit comforts us, makes us strong, and truly changes us and teaches us to lead a life of listening and praying. Does that live enough for you? Do we desire the fruits of the God's Spirit?

**5. Without the fruits of the Spirit the gifts of the Spirit cannot flourish
(1 Corinths 13, Romans 12, Galatians 5:22)**

We have looked at the nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 and at the six gifts in Romans 12, but how are these words meant to be understood? In Romans as well as in Corinth, they come under the framework of: desire to use the gifts which God has given you correctly. Correctly is - for the upbuilding of each other. In Romans, Paul compares the church to a body and Paul makes everybody down to size: cherish no thoughts which do not become you. Do not look jealously at someone else's gifts, but be glad about all the different gifts within the one church of Christ. And after having named the distinguished gifts, he goes on to talk extensively about the first fruit of the Spirit, love (Rom. 12:9ff).

This is also what Paul does in the letter to the church in Corinth. He praises the variety of gifts which have been given and says: think about the unity of the body. Let that be your desire, to serve each other and to love each other. Just as in Romans 12, Paul goes on to praise that first fruit of the Spirit, love, in that famous Bible chapter 1 Corinthians 13. The nine gifts of God's Spirit in Corinthians lose their way if the nine fruits of the Spirit do not grow. You find these fruits in Galatians 5: 1 love; 2 joy; 3 peace; 4 patience; 5 kindness; 6 goodness; 7 faithfulness; 8 gentleness; and 9 self-control. What does this mean in relation to speaking in tongues?

In Corinthians, Paul writes about speaking in tongues: 'for anyone who speaks in a tongue, does not speak to men but to God' (1 Cor. 14:2). The gift of speaking in tongues in Corinth is a gift of prayer, an intense form of worship of God in inexpressible joy. It is such intense prayer and thanksgiving, that there are no human words for it (14:13-19). In chapter 13, Paul speaks about the language of angels. Does this mean maybe, that these sounds are the language of heaven? Whatever the answer, when speaking in tongues, you communicate in full with heaven. It goes beyond your own comprehension (14:14)! It is beyond anybody else's comprehension. That is Paul's point, if this gift has been given to you, let it be upbuilding. Because a gift from God's Spirit without the fruit of God's Spirit is a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. Paul himself, spoke in tongues. No bad word about this good gift does he utter. But he adds: in the church, I rather speak five sensible words than a thousand words in a tongue (14:19).

In verse 39, the conclusion is very clear. Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. The one gift is thus better than the other. Prophecy is better. Strive for that! And as to speaking in tongues, you do not need to focus on that nor should you forbid it. For example, what do you do, if God now, during a prayer meeting, wants to let one of those present speak in tongues? Personally, I would not pray for the gift or seek it, personally I do not desire to have it, but if this gift should be given to a Christian whom I esteem, should I then automatically be negative and oppose him? I would say clearly, please ensure that you have a translator, so



The Greek word charisma originally meant just gift.

that I, and the rest, can understand as well, or otherwise, use this gift only in private (1 Cor. 14:18-19; 28).

Speaking in tongues is a jammer in meetings, if what is said, is not explained in understandable language. If we are together, you want to share and there is no place for ego-tripping, in the form of tongues without translation. Why? Because it is the clear message of God's Word which must be heard in the meetings of the church and let us be glad about this fantastic gift from God's Spirit to his church - the understandable language of the gospel. A church with charisma is a church which lives from God's Word and from God's Spirit. That is what God's Spirit wants you to do, to shelter by God's words, to let your heart and life be enlightened by that word so that this word can shine in every way. This is why Paul finds the gift of prophecy so important! But what is prophecy?

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Looking forward to God's Answer. The effect of being a multicultural church



What effect does missionary work amongst ethnic minorities have on the existing Dutch church? If God blesses us with increase, we have new bonds with Christians who bring the reality of the persecuted church closer to us. In this way, faith receives a new opportunity of proving itself. An example from Rotterdam.

"Life sentence for blasphemy - The Pakistani Christian Ranjha Masih (55) has been given a life long sentence because he threw a stone at a billboard upon which a text from the Koran was written. Masih has been in custody for five years." We read this sort of report regularly in the newspapers. The source is usually Open Doors, or, via the magazine published by Open Doors - *Compass Direct* or *Voice of the Martyrs*.

Christians in Pakistan are having a difficult time. A news bulletin like the one above, gives some indication of what can happen. The law against blasphemy in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, can easily be used. Offending Allah, the Koran or the Prophet Mohammed, are charges which can be brought against Christians and lead to arrest and court martial. You rarely ever find out what happened or what preceded the deed. How far can you be provoked or challenged before you lose your patience or self-control? Then you pick up that

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stone and you throw it. Did you intend to hit the billboard? Did it land there by accident? Or have they made up the situation in order to nail that Christian, come what may?

Acquittal

Fortunately, not every accusation or charge results in an actual conviction. Last year, on 4th June the Christian, Aslam Masih was released in appeal (by the way, the surname Masih is common amongst Christians in Pakistan. Masih means Christ or Christian. People really know each other more via family relationships than by their surname, so that the very common name Masih, results in no confusion there). This Aslam was arrested in 1998. The charge was that he hung



East and West meet

texts from the Koran on a talisman, around a dog's neck. Wearing a talisman (e.g. with texts from the Koran) is normal for many in Pakistan. It is meant as protection against evil spirits (demons) or the evil eye of your neighbours. It is fairly understandable, that someone who hangs a talisman around a dog's neck can expect reaction and aggression from Muslims. Even though Aslam was sentenced to life twice, and given a huge fine because of blasphemy, he was granted freedom this year in appeal. You ask yourself: did new evidence come to light? Have witnesses retracted their charges or changed them? What happened which led to acquittal?

Which influence?

It is also possible that pressure from outside played a part. For a number of years, the continuing reports about Christians in Pakistan have stimulated us to put pressure upon the government in Islamabad. This is possible via the embassy in the Netherlands. Because we have Pakistani families as members of the church in Rotterdam, our involvement in this land with the Christians there, is greater than in other countries where Christians are persecuted. Summer 2002, Pakistani Christians in the Hague protested by the Embassy. Workers at the embassy who also know the Pakistani members of our church, briefly allowed them to speak. Together with other Pakistani Christians (immigrants with residence permits and asylum seekers) they form a force by constantly seeking the authorities attention. We are convinced that this persistent pressure via the government can help to soften the lot of the Pakistani Christians.

Involvement

Especially when you know members with Pakistani origins personally, you realise what effect the ties with the land can have upon them. If the subject is subordination or persecution of Pakistani, then they think about their own family: parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, as far as the wider family can go. It suddenly takes on a deeper meaning when you have seen photos, or, as I have experienced myself - if you have been there and have visited the people in their homes, their district, their city. You see how members here want to do something; the worry which drives them into action. They regularly send money to support their families there and sometimes money creates possibilities which were just not there without it. Preferably, they do more. Go to Pakistan? Then you have at least seen each other again. Getting people here? That is difficult. Pakistani asylum seekers have little chance of getting a residence permit in the Netherlands.

Prayer

In discussions here in our congregation, we come back, repeatedly, to the power of prayer. It seems to be a movement which contradicts itself, you desire to do something out of your restlessness, concern, involvement, but the most powerful thing you can do is to put your hands together. The histories recorded in the Bible stimulate us, as far as that is concerned, to keep coming together to pray: the early

Christian church and Peter's release (Acts 12), the words in James about Elijah, who was a man like us (James 5). What makes this exiting is that as Dutch Christians, you really can be active together. The contacts with Pakistan via the telephone or via the embassy run via the Pakistani Christians together and you become involved when you hear their reports. But coming together for prayer to our mutual God and Father, is a way of being active, together.

Looking forward

June 2003 we organised a prayer meeting for Pakistani Christians. Because of the existing worry amongst the Christians we looked for a way, a method, a place, to give room to this involvement. Through prayer, reading from the Bible, song and reflection about God's word, we wanted to encourage each other, witness to the truth and, above all, to call the Almighty God to action. He is able to influence judges, to let witnesses speak the truth, turn hearts to reconciliation and towards justice. In the past, he continually offered surprising exits to his people and this surprise is what we expect in Psalm 5:3: "In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation". For this reason, my thoughts about release of Christians in Pakistan go in the direction of God's intervention - however that turns out - whether by means of blessing the effect of letters, petitions, and the like, or through an invisible work in the hearts of Muslims in Pakistan.

In this way, being a multicultural church has an effect on the local church in the Netherlands. Via this way, the Lord can challenge our faith to prove itself in "the most important part of thankfulness", prayer.



The father of a Pakistani member, who died a few years ago.

God's Word in Human Language

In the 2001 year-end supplement to the Dutch Christian newspaper, *Nederlands Dagblad* (Netherlands Daily), editor Willem Bouwman registered several shifts in understanding the authority of the Bible, he observed in the Reformed and evangelical Dutch world. These observations subsequently led the authors of the volume under review to survey opinions across a wide spectrum of "orthodox" or "Bible-believing Netherlands" in order to determine whether a trend could be detected. More than thirty neo-orthodox, reformed, and evangelical theologians and ministers, were interviewed. Topics treated in the interviews and subsequent articles include perspectives on the authority of Scripture, on the nature of the Bible's recorded history, on the role of women in the church, and on homosexuality. During the Spring of 2003 the results were presented in a series of newspaper articles now collected under the title *Gods Woord in mensentaal*. *Denken over het gezag van de Bijbel* (*God's Word in Human Language. Thinking about the Authority of the Bible*).

The 41 articles are arranged in eight chapters. The opening four chapters introduce the range of issues to be considered, including the authority of the Bible in church history, sensitivities surrounding a discussion about the Scripture's authority, shifts in understanding hermeneutics. There is a brief glossary of terms employed in the discussion. Readers will find the heart of the book in chapters 5-7. Here those interviewed analyze the characteristics of the history narrated in the Bible, and the scope of ethical issues surrounding women in the church and homosexuality. This portion is concluded with reflection and analysis. Though the heart of the book lies in the middle, the heartbeat of the book is heard in its final chapter: 8. Here a number of biblical scholars and pastors provide insightful meditative summaries of assorted Bible books. These meditations were published simultaneously alongside the interview articles in the Saturday supplement to the *Nederlands Dagblad*.

Historical developments

Conflicts about the Bible are nothing new. The early church wrestled with the authority of the Old Testament; the Reformation recovered the authority of the whole Bible; and many Reformed and evangelical churches resisted the debilitating criticisms sponsored by the Enlightenment.

Clear evidence of a shift in perspective among a number of Dutch theologians appeared in the latter half of the 20th century. The reports of the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church: *Klare Wijn* [Clear Wine] 1966) and the (*synodaal*) *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* ('synodical' Reformed Churches in the Netherlands: *God met Ons* [God



About the author:

Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman (1950) is professor for Ethics and New Testament at the Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer (Indiana, USA). Several reformed church federations have their ministers educated there, especially the United Reformed Churches in North America. Dr. Kloosterman obtained his doctoral degree at the Theological University of Kampen (Broederweg) under the direction of prof. dr. J. Douma with a dissertation on the strong and weak in Corinth.

With Us, 1980) shifted the locus of authority from the text of Scripture to the encounter between text and reader. Surprisingly, since those turbulent decades, the critics of these two reports have found themselves having to answer the very same exegetical and hermeneutical questions for which these reports had sought a middle way.



The cover of the work in question which translates - "God's Word in human language" (photo: *Nederlands Dagblad*)



Koert van Bekkum (photo: Nederlands Dagblad)

Controversy surrounding the Bible and its central teachings gave birth, in the 19th century, to American fundamentalism. Seeking to oppose the anti-supernaturalism embedded in Darwin's evolutionism and in the Enlightenment's radical Scripture-criticism, fundamentalists defended five non-negotiable points: the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, Christ's bodily resurrection, and Christ's physical return.

Subsequent history has led many to characterize American fundamentalism as reactionary, biblicistic, selective in its doctrinal emphases, anti-intellectual/scientific, and inordinately judgmental toward Christians who disagree. Although "inerrancy" became the watchword of American fundamentalism, orthodox believers in the Netherlands preferred (and still prefer) the term "infallibility," since inerrancy has led to a narrow approach to Scripture interpretation which smooths out the literary and textual unevenness characteristic of human authorship.

Fundamentalism paved the way for the emergence in the 1950s of (neo-)evangelicalism, championed by leaders like Billy Graham and Carl Henry. The second half of the 20th century witnessed the development of robust academic theology and self-conscious cultural engagement among evangelicals.

Looking back on the debates of the 19th and 20th centuries, several theologians surveyed by these Dutch journalists noted that fundamentalism has unfortunately shared several of the same modern and rationalistic features which characterized the presuppositions and conclusions of the Enlightenment. By accepting the terms of the debate, fundamentalism has provided no enduring response to either the method or the conclusions of Scripture-criticism. Especially Reformed biblical scholarship has remained unsatisfied with the choice between the "liberalism" of



Reina Wiskerke (photo: Nederlands Dagblad)

Scripture-criticism or the "conservatism" of fundamentalism.

In his concluding summary of this historical review, Koert van Bekkum notes that throughout the church's history no solution to problems associated with the Bible's authority has pleased everyone, but the various answers did provide many Christians with courage to keep believing God's Word in their own day. This is important to remember when questions surrounding the Bible's authority are now shifting from the theoretical and historical to the concrete and practical. "There are never definitive answers," writes Van Bekkum, "But for that reason it remains important to keep challenging one another, from the Bible, to follow Jesus in very concrete ways" (44).

Old questions, nuanced answers

The same author provides a further analysis of the shift he observes in the way old questions raised in preceding decades are today being answered by assorted Reformed and evangelical scholars (99-102).

These questions involve the nature of the Bible's way of "doing" history. The length and nature of the creation days, for example, has long been a matter of discussion and exegetical disagreement. In 1924, A. Noordtjij proposed that the seven days of Genesis 1 constitute a narrative framework drawn from Israel's own seven-day week (in his book *Gods Woord en der eeuwen getuigenis. Het Oude Testament in het licht der Oostersche opgravingen [God's Word and the Testimony of the Ages. The Old Testament in the Light of Oriental Archeology*, Kampen: Kok, 1st editon 1924, 2^e enlarged edition 1931). Although his proposal did not enjoy widespread acceptance at the time, it was not widely considered to lie beyond exegetical possibility or confessional bounds. The more surprising, therefore, observes Van Bekkum, is the recent alarm expressed when a Reformed (liberated) minister in the Netherlands set forth a position similar to that of Noordtjij.

Today, opinions diverge regarding more than the nature of the creation days. When asked about the details of Genesis 1-3, a number of respondents indicated that maintaining the historicity of Adam and Eve and of humanity's fall into sin was essential and non-negotiable, because the Bible later



Wim Houtman(photo: Nederlands Dagblad)

incorporates these realities as central parts of the gospel message. Maintaining the historicity of the garden or of the serpent, however, was not as essential. British Anglican John Stott exemplifies this viewpoint: "I hold open the significance of the tree of life and the serpent, because they appear later in Scripture, in contexts where they are clearly symbolic" (Rev. 2:7 and Rev. 12), "but we must maintain the historicity of Adam. Paul's theology stands or falls with the fact that Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience are both equally historical events" (89).

The shift has come, according to Van Bekkum, more in the tone and temper of current exegetical debates on this and similar exegetical issues. Some may be inclined to wonder whether the gap between professional theologian and the ordinary believer continues to widen. Van Bekkum responds that as Bible readers in both groups have become more alert to the Bible's message and aware of the original historical context of that message, humility and patience have brought the professional and non-professional Bible reader closer together. "In the arena of the Bible's history, more questions are left open among orthodox Christians than was earlier the

case. This not without its risks. But from a certain perspective such a situation is also healthy. In a church service the positive message must predominate. Problems and questions may not overrun the uncomplicated conviction that the Bible is presenting reality and history. As long as this does not happen, then it is appropriate for the Christian church to provide room, in the catechism class, the study group, and the lecture hall, for looking carefully at difficult questions and uncertainties. This is appropriate perhaps for no other reason than to discern the unique nature of trusting in God" (102).

Homosexuality

No issue has the potential to arouse more misunderstanding and consternation than the response among many orthodox Reformed in the Netherlands to homosexuals in the church. It is unfortunate that a number of observers outside the Netherlands have registered alarm regarding the prevalent use of the distinction between homosexual orientation (*homofilie*) and homosexual practice (*homosexualiteit*), without clarifying precisely what is and is not being defended among Dutch church leaders by this distinction. This distinction seeks to apply the gospel to the challenge being faced throughout Western culture of an increasingly aggressive defense of the homosexual lifestyle, but: without rejecting a man or woman for the sake of his homosexual orientation. The Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting network has developed this last notion as its strategy to seek through its programming to address the hostility and hatred against homosexuals that has arisen among Christians in the Netherlands.

Assuming that the Bible prohibits modern homosexual practices (an assumption not shared by all those interviewed), how the Bible's prohibition against homosexuality is to be maintained in contemporary Western culture is a matter that often divides Christians. Different opinions regarding the capacity for change, acceptable limits of expression, and the appropriate evidence of repentance, continue to engage the churches and the religious press.

This issue of homosexuality has highlighted the calling of Christians who struggle with homosexual feelings to suffer for the sake of following Jesus Christ, and has led many Reformed and evangelical churches to examine the *communal* dimension of the identity and suffering shared by *all* Christian disciples. Christians who struggle with homosexual feelings need accountability to the church, along with accompaniment by the church. Living and walking together with all the saints—that is the route emphasized by many leaders who were interviewed. The calling to suffer, as one turns from sin to follow Christ, applies to everyone in the church, heterosexual and homosexual alike, no matter what source promises pleasure and pain-free living apart from Jesus Christ.

Tota scriptura

For Bible-believers familiar with the past fifty years of Dutch church history, views advocated by men such as Lever, Kuitert, and Wiersinga have generated no little concern on

both sides of the Atlantic. In assessing whatever shift may have occurred in recent years, Dutch journalist Peter Bergwerff provides cautious commentary. The relatively relaxed conversations with those interviewed, coupled with the universal commitment to the primacy of Scripture, suggests that an atmosphere of openness obtains nowadays—openness to address substantive questions of exegesis, hermeneutics, and theology with a measure of freedom from fearful reactionism. So long as faith and reverence permeate our study of the Bible, we will remain open to the God who speaks, who in His speaking overwhelms us with His power, grace, love, and righteousness. The Bible is, after all, God's personal address to His beloved children. "For - with all due respect - we believe not in a book, but in a Person. He gave us His Book so that we might know Him and His will better. Bible reading means bowing in reverence before the most holy God of heaven and earth, our beloved Father" (133).

Today's more relaxed and open concourse with the Bible, saturated with faith, helps protect us from a human-centered hermeneutic which often limits the Bible's usefulness in terms of selected favorite passages. Such an approach limits the Bible to a sourcebook of individual relevance and individual spiritual experience. Bergwerff poses a concluding question that highlights the potential irony implicit in the low number of responses to this series of articles appearing in *Nederlands Dagblad*. "Is it perhaps the case," asks Bergwerff, "that the issue of the Bible's authority no longer interests 'Bible-believing' Netherlands because we are satisfied with our own personal 'mini-Bibles' (our collection of favorite verses and pet passages, NDK)? If so, then Scripture-criticism—which is nothing less than cutting up God's Word to fit our own measurements—will have penetrated the orthodox fortresses after all, though in a different form than we assumed it would have taken. In the time of the Reformation, *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) was rediscovered and argued in opposition to various human and ecclesiastical opinions. Today, perhaps our slogan should be: *Tota Scriptura*, the whole Scripture. For was not God pleased to provide us a continually fresh and inexhaustible source of living water in all of the sixty-six Bible books? So just start reading and keep on reading—that is: to submit yourself to the authority of the Scripture" (134).

Definitions

The articles in this volume report and summarize diverse theological opinions among Dutch evangelical and Reformed theologians and leaders. This means, naturally, that each theologian is speaking only for himself and should not be associated with the views of any other. The strength of an approach like this is that it provides a broad survey, but the weakness of the presentation is that the coherence and the connections are not always clear.

From the very first page of introduction to the final page of analysis, phrases like "orthodox-Christian Netherlands" and "Bible-believing Netherlands" are employed without definition. One is left wondering what understanding of *orthodoxy* led to the inclusion both of the theological participants chosen and of their opinions. The thirty theologians interviewed span a range from liberals and neo-

orthodox in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* and the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (synodical), to conservative leaders from evangelical circles. Do the authors intend to characterize all the opinions along this spectrum as "orthodox" and "Bible-believing"? Are all these opinions of the same quality? Are they compatible? It appears that because the authors are attempting to be objectively descriptive, they purposely avoid registering any judgments about collected opinions, except to suggest in numerous ways throughout their account that (1) extremes (right or left) are unpopular, and (2) openness and love seem to be on the increase.

If a shift of opinion about the authority of the Bible has indeed been occurring in the Netherlands, and if all the views reported in these chapters belong to orthodox and Bible-believing Netherlands, then it seems plausible to assume that a shift has occurred also in the currency value of these descriptive phrases themselves—phrases that necessarily embody an evaluation. From the outset, the meaning of the adjective "orthodox" becomes uncertain, and the repeated use of "Bible-believing" becomes an exercise in *petitio principii*. The journalists discovered that a shift of opinion has been occurring, but determined that it has been occurring among people who "believe the Bible." But is not this precisely the question needing to be answered? Whether their characterization of these opinions is accurate can be judged only after the results are in, not before, and only in terms of somebody's accepted definition of "orthodox" and "Bible-believing." Whose, then? The authors never tell us.

The Bible's exercise of authority

Decades of discussion throughout the Reformed and evangelical Dutch world have yielded a number of distinctions worth using and maintaining. For example, we may distinguish the *nature* of the Bible's authority (it is *divine*, since the Scriptures are the address of God Himself) from the exercise of that authority—analogueous, perhaps, to the nature and exercise of parental authority or civil authority.

If I understand the current conversations going on in the Netherlands, people are being careful to point out that the Bible's exercise of its authority is personal and *volitional* and *affective*. This means that the Bible (God Himself) does not exercise its divinely intended authority until that authority is personally recognized in terms that include loving obedience.

This observation is important. The Bible's inherent authority is not to be abstracted from the relationship of faith and obedience within which that authority operates as God intended. For example, while agreeing with the claim that the Bible teaches creation in six days, let alone six days, may be *necessary* evidence of submitting to the Bible's authority (and there is wide disagreement about this claim among the respondents), such agreement is not in any case *sufficient* evidence of submitting to the Bible's authority. True submission to Scripture's authority requires also that there be evidence like the fruit of the Spirit. This emphasis resembles the point made by the apostle James, about the inadequacy of faith without works.

A certain disconnection occurs, however, when these



Michelangelo's view of God's creation of mankind.

authors clearly identify disagreement among the respondents regarding the *content claims* of Scripture, but seem nevertheless to suppose there despite this reality, there is agreement about the *function* of that Scripture. Unfortunately, the various views reported in these essays did not agree about what the Bible teaches in Genesis 1-3, or what the Bible teaches in regard to women's ordination and homosexuality. Phrases like "not as simple as we used to think," and "not as sure as we once were," and "not as clear as it used to be" are sprinkled throughout the chapters with enough frequency to arouse concern. Perpetual and deep disagreement about the historical and doctrinal content of Scripture can be enervating, to be sure, but it would be a serious mistake to suppose such agreement could be bypassed en route to the unity found in a "message" whose component parts are subject to dispute.

Three notes worth hearing

The most inviting and compelling features of this Dutch conversation arise in connection with putting the Bible into practice in the life of the church and the believer. Three particular emphases deserve our careful reflection.

First, in the context of discussions involving Scripture and homosexuality, many Reformed and evangelical believers in the Netherlands operate with the distinction between homosexual orientation, and homosexual desires and practice. For many (though not all) the respondents, the Scripture's prohibition of such desires and practice is clear, permanent, and relevant. Precisely as a result of that commitment, a number of Reformed churches in the Netherlands are struggling biblically (i.e., according to the Bible) to relate the gospel to men and women wrestling against their sexual desires and for purity and integrity before God. Together these church members-no matter what their sexual orientation-are seeking to be committed to Jesus Christ in a way of discipleship that honors the Bible's teaching faithfully and confronts sin's brokenness authentically. Following Jesus Christ in this world, which is the embodiment (or incarnation) of acknowledging the Bible's authority, is a communal, ecclesial activity.

Second, if the Bible's authority is to be acknowledged

rightly, then the testimony of the church with regard to sin-any sin-must be as broad and pointed, as wide and deep, as the message of the whole Bible. From this ongoing conversation we may learn some of the challenges, difficulties, and blessings that come from demonstrating (rather than merely talking about) how Christians should treat sinners graciously. True enough, some "in the world" who are ignorant need to hear that abortion, and gambling, and homosexual practice, and a host of other sins are wrong. But there is a growing number of such "sinners" among our neighborhoods, extended families, and acquaintances, who need to know where they can be washed clean from these particular sins; they must learn where divine grace is to be received, where it is administered weekly, where it produces people who wear forgiveness on their faces. And if the church speaks only the word of condemnation-lending her voice to the cries of the "cultural conservatives" with their placards, finger-wagging, and lobbying efforts-she has compromised the gospel and thereby reduced the authority of the Bible. How we talk about sin and sinners betrays our view of Scripture's authority. Talking about sinners in a way that is devoid of compassion, empty of grace, and bereft of pity is as much a denial of the Bible's authority as denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we listen carefully, we can overhear the Reformed and evangelicals in the Netherlands as they learn how to talk about sinners, and we just might be able to "go to school" on them.

Finally, the conversations reported in this book suggest that the reactionism that so often marks "reform" movements and conservative impulses is not giving way to loving the Lord fearlessly. Reactionism is the child of fear-fear that "it will happen all over again," fear of the "slippery slope." The energies of reactionism are spent defining the negative, with little energy left over for demonstrating the positive. There are dangers, to be sure-that the pendulum will swing too far, again; that liberty will mutate into license; that the antithesis gets obliterated. And although this little volume doesn't identify these dangers too clearly, voices continue to be raised among the Reformed and evangelicals in the Netherlands alerting folks to the presence of these and related dangers.

The book's concluding forty pages contain a number of two-page meditative overviews aimed at showing us how to live with the Bible, how to receive and experience its message through quiet reading and reflection. These meditations are warm and rich devotionals. They remind us, as we close the book, that any "thinking about the authority of the Bible" must lead us here-closer to the throbbing, pulsating heart of God, which He invites us to hold in our hands, having given His Word in human language.

Review of:

Koert van Bekkum, Wim Houtman, Reina Wiskerke, et al., *Gods Woord in mensentaal. Denken over het gezag van de Bijbel*, Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2003; paperback; 178 pages; price € 10 (outside The Netherlands plus postage); ISBN 90 72801 08 3; send your order to the Nederlands Dagblad, preferably by email: abonneeservice@nd.nl, with all relevant customer details or ask your bookstore.

Sustaining Praise - The Message of the Books of the Psalms



150 Psalms. At first sight there seems to be not much structure in the collection of Psalms. Some Bible translations have helpfully added headings which point the reader to a division into five books. What more is there to say?

Psalms research in the second half of the twentieth century has made it clear that it is very much worthwhile to probe beyond the appearance of this superficial impression. A recent survey of the developments in Psalms research nicely summarizes this in the phrase "From Psalms to Psalter". Each Psalm has its own message, but the fact that the Psalms were gathered to form a collection makes a contribution of its own.

Psalms research these days not only looks at the background and origin of the psalms and the division in different types, but also at the dimension which is added by the structure of the book as a whole. The quest has not finished; not all details have been put on the map yet. There is so far no unanimity about the interpretation of what has been discovered, and this will likely remain so. But what has

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been established so far justifies the thesis that in the Book of Psalms we find a careful composition which as composition has a message of its own.

Beginning and End

Most of the Psalms in the Hebrew text have a heading, sometimes not more than a few instructions for their performance, sometimes a link with history. In the case of the Psalms at the beginning and at the end such a heading is lacking. This is not a matter of chance, as research has made abundantly clear. Psalms 1-2 have in all likelihood been put deliberately at the beginning as an introduction to the book as a whole. The last five Psalms, 146-150, are intended to be



... The first psalm of the Introduction draws a portrait of someone who delights in the teaching of the LORD... (photo: Tjerk de Vries)

the epilogue.

From the selection of precisely these Psalms as introduction and epilogue we can derive some important principles for reading and using the Psalms. The book of Psalms is like a school in which we are taught how to speak with God. God is spoken of in the third person, but more often he is addressed in the second person, e.g.: "O God, you are my God."

The first psalm of the Introduction draws a portrait of someone who delights in the teaching of the LORD. A comparison is made with a tree planted along an irrigation channel. The first lesson one learns is that speaking with God will gain in concentration and depth when you first listen to God speaking to you. You grow best in speaking with God when what you say is an answer to what God is saying.

The second psalm takes a look at the context from which you speak with God. What is an ordinary person like you able to achieve in a world where others are in the positions of power? The God with whom you speak is seated sovereignly over the busyness of the powers that be. The second psalm puts one in the position of worship before the throne of the real king of heaven and earth.

The five psalms of the epilogue all have the same message. Speaking with God goes in a particular direction, the final destination is: praise. Each of the five books of the Psalms points in that direction. In the case of the first four books that praise is just a few lines. The last book is concluded with a full psalm (145), in which each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet to praise God in the most complete way. After that, as an encore, comes the epilogue: another five psalms of praise.

Lament and Praise

What we discovered at the macro level is also found at the micro level, and most strikingly in the psalms of lament. All kinds of human emotions are put into words in the Psalms: anxiety, hatred, love, innocence, shame, guilt, doubt, sorrow,

desire, trust, joy, despair. The negative emotions and feelings are sounded in the laments.

One out of every three Psalms is a lament, in which an individual or a community brings a complaint in the presence of God. Different situations may have resulted in the complaint: treason by someone who you thought you could trust, a groundless accusation, the presence of enemies, awareness of guilt, the feelings that God fails to respond to what you are saying to him.

In a great number of the psalms of lament we find a remarkable phenomenon. Scholars sometimes have a hard time to explain it. Why is it that most psalms of lament (though not all) conclude with praise or an expression of trust in God? Do we have to assume, as one suggestion has it, that between lament and praise there was a liturgical moment in which a priest gave the person in prayer a message of salvation from God? The problem is that one does not find hardly any traces of such oracles.

The more your speaking with God is an answer to the speaking of God, the more reason you will have to praise and trust him. The person who prayed the lament of Psalm 13 ("How long, O LORD ...") takes hold of just one of those words which God has taught him: "steadfast love", one of the key words which God uses to introduce himself to people. The words "I trust in your steadfast love" is the ground in which the lament grows and at the same time it provides the reason for not giving in.

Invitation

Both at macro level and micro level, the Psalms are an invitation to the reader. All speaking with God that is an answer to what God says, will conclude in praise, if you keep it up long enough. That is the way in which speaking with God may reach the end of praise, even in the most desperate situations. That destination is not always reached (Psalms 39; 88), and at times the prayer indicates that right now it is too hard, and expresses the hope that one day it will be possible again to praise God (42-43). This kind of speaking

with God has also found its place in the collection.

That is the invitation: keep it up. The Hebrew name for the collection of Psalm (in which a third of the psalms are laments) is *Tehillim*, that is: "Praises". The word says it all.

The more your speaking with God is an answer to the speaking of God, the more reason you will have to praise and trust him
(photo: Tjerk de Vries)





A heart for the city

A practical-theological investigation into opportunities for the church in an urban society

During the nineteen-eighties I worked in the city of Curitiba, a big city with millions of inhabitants, located in the southern part of Brazil. I participated in a missionary project of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands. At that time I became fascinated in the interaction between the church community and the urban society. Following my return from Brazil I worked as minister in Groningen from 1990 till 1996, where I ran into the same theme, church versus urban society. By means of this study I would like to contribute to the practical-theological reflection on that theme.

Introduction

In the introductory *chapter 1* I point out three characteristic developments of the rapid urbanization process, which was in progress during the twentieth century.

(1) At the start of the twentieth century the amount of people living in urban settings was greatly outnumbered by those living in rural areas. Nowadays we must conclude that it is about fifty-fifty and it seems that in the future it will be the other way around.

(2) Big cities are getting bigger all the time. At around the year 1900 there were about ten cities which had more than one million inhabitants, so-called megacities. In the meantime there are more than four hundred megacities. The number of cities with more than ten million inhabitants, the so-called *supergiants* or *urban giants*, is still growing.

(3) Within the Third World an enormous migration got started from the rural areas to the urban ones. Considering it from world level one must conclude that people migrate from the South to the North: people of the southern hemisphere are moving to the (big cities of the) northern hemisphere.



...During the nineteen-eighties I worked in the city of Curitiba, a big city with millions of inhabitants, located in the southern part of Brazil...

About the author:

After rounding off his study in the Theological University at Kampen, Peter W. van de Kamp (*1952) was a missionary in Curitiba, Brazil (1979-1989) and minister in Groningen East (1990-1996). Since 1996 he has been a lecturer in Pastoral and Diaconal Care, Preaching and Practical Instruction at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (lib.) in Kampen. On November 19th, 2003 he obtained his doctorate in the University of Utrecht. His thesis was entitled "Heart for the city" and this article is a summary of it.*

The church shows two faces to the urban world. On the one hand the always increasing urbanization process is experienced as a threat to the church. It looks like the churches in the West-European cities are diminishing minorities, which can only bother themselves with survival. On the other hand the process offers possibilities to grow to the churches. The mere presence of a lot of people challenges to missionary activities. Big cities are the new missionary fields.

When considering the interaction between the functioning of the church and the urban society, one of the first questions which forces itself to the foreground is: what belongs to that interaction? In other words: what comes to mind, first and foremost, when dealing with this theme? When the church wants to reflect on her functioning in urban societies and would like to develop fitting strategies, what topics should play an important role? I mean those marked aspects of the total which demand our attention. I aim to take stock of these (strategic) topics and describe them, because the reflection on the interaction between the church community and the urban society begins right there.

This is the reason for formulating the main question to my investigation as follows: *What topics do play an important role when developing a strategy for church communities so they may function in an urban society?*

Three central themes will come up for discussion: (1) the urban society, (2) the functioning of the church and (3) the interaction between the church and the city (because of the terminology: 'the functioning of church communities in an urban society').

In my point of view on practical theology, the direction on the acting (functioning) of the church is the main characteristic of the practical-theological reflection. I understand practical theology to be: theology of the praxis. The Greek word *praxis* means literally *acting*. Practical theology deals with scientific analysis of the acts of the church and theological formulation of a theory about this



The Ph D student talking to dr. B.Kamphuis

acting or functioning. The gospel feeds and stimulates the acting of the church. The church operates in engagement with the gospel. To put it in a different way: God's acting happens through the service of the church and people. Practical theology occupies itself - as a distinguishable part of the subject Theology - with theoretical reflection on the acting of the church (and of the believers as 'representatives' of the church). Not only the question of *how* the functioning of the church can be realized is important, but certainly as important is the question of *why* it should be realized and what meaning it has or should have.

Because of the reason that the praxis (the functioning of the church within the context of the society) forms the core of the practical theology, it is logical to take the praxis as point of departure for the making of theological theory. That's the reason why an inductive way of working is typical for practical theology.

- (1) A certain praxis will be described and analysed and while doing so, questions and themes will be listed.
- (2) These questions and themes will then be investigated and questioned regarding the background concepts, which are present in the investigated practical situations and which were shaped by certain steering principles. These concepts will be critically investigated and again reflected upon. This occurs on a basis of (normative) insights, which are derived from theoretical reflection and the forming of theory in relevant social sciences.
- (3) In this way impulses are brought about out of practical-theological forming of theory in order to adjust or renew

existing praxis. In all this, development of a strategy (of change) can be of great importance.

On the base of this concept regarding practical theology and practical theological research I begin my investigation by describing and analysing two practical situations in order to track down questions and themes, which are of importance in the interaction between churches and cities (Part A). I would like to research and further develop these themes with regards to answering the main question of my investigation (Part B). The answering of that question can then be done, attached to different recommendations regarding strategy for the interaction between church community and the urban society (Part C).

Practical Situations

In Part A (chapters 2-4) I present a limited multiple case study which deals with the following practical situations: *Redeemer Presbyterian Church* of Manhattan (New York City, USA) and *Old Wards* (as neighbourhoods) *Pastorate* (OWP) of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. I describe these practical situations while regarding the following themes:

- Theological concepts.

The kingdom of God is the centre of the theological concept of Redeemer. 'Kingdom' means that the whole world is being renewed by the undoing of the results of sin. The gospel (as Word of the kingdom) makes quite clear that we are much more sinful than we ever could realise, but at the same time it makes clear that we are much more accepted than we have ever dared to hope. The context of the gospel preaching is



...Following my return from Brazil I worked as minister in Groningen from 1990 till 1996...

also very important for Redeemer: in case of real situations we consult the Bible, taking into account our traditions and culture we live in. In that way the gospel of God's kingdom is being 'contextualised', so brought into context.

In the theological concept of the OWP the main emphases lies upon human beings and their salvation. That salvation of people has got everything to do with the real living circumstances of the old city neighbourhoods. In that situation the gospel as story of people shows that it is a redeeming experience to discover that the decision is happening through the Spirit of God and not by means of power or violence. Salvation takes place when people become subjects of change (transformation) in their lives. People experience salvation when they stand up to their situation of suffering and when they can actually put into words their hope for a better future. The OWP -as neighbourhood pastorate- is an ally with discriminated and damaged people aiming at their freedom.

These notes show a considerable difference in theological concepts of the Redeemer and the OWP. At Redeemer justification and salvation are the basic ideas of Christian faith. The gospel of reconciliation of sins is the core. The broken relationship between God and mankind has to be restored. The way Christ did restore the relationship with God has got consequence for the relationship of people among themselves. However, salvation has first of all a 'vertical' meaning. The OWP actually gives salvation a horizontal meaning and uses a different opinion of salvation. Salvation means that human beings become subjects to their own history in the process of change in society to the kingdom of God. The OWP regards it as decisive that real happenings in an old neighbourhood are labeled in

theological terminology: when human beings become themselves and are able to stand up for their own concerns, God will lead them by hand to the future.

- *Ecclesiological concepts.*

The difference in theological concepts has got consequences for the ecclesiological concepts of the Redeemer and the OWP. OWP documents show a certain degree of pessimism while regarding the church. One could detect a ambivalent relationship towards the church by those employed by the OWP. Contrary to that the Redeemer documents are much more positive. There is a hopeful expectation design.

Redeemer as well as the OWP place the church in the perspective of God's kingdom. However, these perspectives get a different meaning because of different concepts of God's kingdom. Among those of the OWP the perspective of the kingdom brings into view the exile of the church (the church is a minority in the city). Within the concept of exile the church can declare solidarity with the marginalised bottom-side of the society. The church becomes 'church for the others' by putting herself between brackets and disregarding herself. At Redeemer the church is the embodiment of the kingdom of God (the kingdom which is there 'already', but has 'not yet' come to its fullness). On the one hand it means that the church has become a 'new community' inside the society, while on the other hand the church stands right amidst the society as a representative of God's kingdom.

- *Sociological aspects.*

Redeemer has a positive attitude towards the city because of its conviction that this attitude belongs to Christians (because God is the 'inventor' of the city). This however does not mean that Redeemer does not see the negative sides of the city. It is soberly marked that sin takes care for a reverse world in the city: meant as hiding place for the weak the city becomes the place to hide for God. Meant as cradle for culture and civilization the city becomes the cultural trend-setter which challenges God. Meant as place for seekers of God and builders of temples it becomes the centre of idolatry. Exactly these contrasts result in a battle between Jerusalem and Babylon in the cities of this world. That's the reason why cities are crucial and trend-setting.

The view on the city at the OWP is shaped by the old neighbourhoods. These become the angle as to which the OWP regards the city. These neighbourhoods are examples of misery and have become receptacles of discriminated groups. Those of the OWP regard the (division of) urban society as a mirror image of the whole society, which is marked by contrasts of interests.

It is clear that Redeemer and the OWP look at the city from different angles. Redeemer -starting at a Biblical concept- attempts to develop a positive relationship with the city, while the OWP -starting at the misery in the old city neighbourhoods- uses a concept, which puts the discrimination of certain people and groups at the centre.

- *Interaction.*

The interaction between Redeemer and the urban society of

Manhattan, New York can be shown in different activities of Redeemer, like services and preaching, catechism and pastoral work, evangelization and diaconate. The (conscious and looked for) interaction is carried out through the idea of Church-for-the-city: the church community has got an open, loving relationship to the city in which the church develops a counterculture. Within the framework of the OWP one can only talk about the city in one specific way: the interaction between workers of churches (as representatives of certain church communities) and the old city neighbourhoods, in which the OWP explicitly wants to connect to that which the inhabitants themselves are able to do and wish to do. Its point of view on its task is clear: 'from the neighbourhoods to the church' (and not the other way around).

Concepts, reflections and observations

In part B, *chapter 5*, I explain the theological concepts which form the background of the practical situations as described previously. In that way I describe the broad theological framework from the -in real practical situations- detailed theological concepts. When talking about Redeemer the concepts of the American (missionary) theologians Roger Greenway and Harvey Conn are dealt with and with regards to the OWP the concept of the American theologian Harvey Cox and the reflection in the World Council of Churches via UIM-URM (*Urban and Industrial Mission*, later *Urban Rural Mission*).

In *chapter 6* I pay attention to the one pole of my investigation: the church. Hereby I am using a practical-theological perspective: it is about the ecclesiological

concept, aimed at the functioning of the church.

When making an inventory of ecclesiological aspects coming up out of the practical situations and its background concepts, it is clear that the question to the functioning of the church is an essential theme for the reflection on the interaction between church and city. I describe 'function' as *the aimed at and/or the actual effect of human acting for a certain (target) group or social system*. I describe 'functioning' as: *human acting in order to reach the aimed at effect by a certain (target) group or social system*. This leads to the following description of the functioning of the church: the acting of the church with regards to the reaching of the aimed-at-effects by her members and for the society. Following that I comprehensively describe how and why I have chosen three functions of the church: *preaching, fellowship and service*. This all leads to the following description of the functioning of the church:

The church functions as church, when she exercises her functions *preaching, fellowship and service*.

- (1) *Preaching* as proclamation of interesting news about the salvation deeds in Christ for the people.
- (2) *Fellowship* as people-who-belong because of being part of Christ's salvation, realized by mutual building, in critical openness towards the society.
- (3) *Service* as availability for God and people, by imitating Christ, in word and deed aimed at society.

I use my practical ecclesiological concept also as instrument to look critically at the ecclesiological aspects of the practical situations as described. In that way I reach the conclusion that the three functions are reasonably



In order to have a heart for and to be a heart for the city, it is sometimes necessary to rebuild substantially. Members of the Reformed Church in Breda were busy for a number of years with serious repair work.

recognizable in the activities of Redeemer and that in the activities of the OWP two of the three functions (preaching and fellowship) are unsatisfactorily recognizable.

In *chapter 7* the other pole of my investigation comes into view: the urban society. First I give some orientation in urban sociology:

(1) Sociology of the city used to contrast rural and urban areas. Later on however this contrast (dichotomy) was faded because of the view that cities are not closed off systems, but have an open relationship with their surrounding (world-) communities.

(2) The metaphor 'social laboratory' is typical for tradition of research of the Chicago-school of the first decades of the twentieth century and concerns itself with the human society and its physical surroundings.

(3) The metaphor 'political arena' marks the position of the city researchers of the 'new urban sociology' from the nineteen seventies, who were interested in the economical and political (interest-)struggles in the city.

(4) The metaphor 'cultural mosaic' is significant for the urban-anthropological turn in urban sociology as a reaction to the multi-culturalizing of the Western European cities at the end of the twentieth century and pictures the city as multiform meeting place.

Following that, I make specific observations, which deal with certain sociological aspects to themes, those which have appeared in the practical situations and background concepts. The following aspects receive due attention:

- *Characteristics of the city.*

When describing all those different reactions to the well-known description of the city by Louis Wirth, I must conclude that every attempt to define the concept of city and attempt to describe its features, will have to be put in perspective, because defining a city is connected to and depends on a certain time period and culture and also because there are different kinds of cities and urbanity. However, this putting-into-perspective doesn't mean that it is impossible for urban sociologists to come to certain general characteristics of the concept of city. These characteristics are in general terms commonly accepted. In view of my investigation it is of importance to arrive at a certain choice of general characteristics, because they offer points of connection with regards to the analysis of the interaction between church and urban society.

I have made the following choice in view of the characteristics of the urban society: *density, heterogeneity, mobility and complexity.*

- *Areas of the city.*

One could conclude that the relationships of the different areas of the city (e.g. centre, old neighbourhoods, suburbs) to each other and to the total of the city, are important matters to deal with. I conclude that in view of the functioning of the church, it is useful and necessary to define a city area (as being a micro-level urban society) and to take into account specific combinations of general characteristics, applicable to that area on its own.

- *The pioneer function of the city.* In view of the present world-community, the city has a dominant position in relationship to its surroundings. The city is the place where important decisions are made about the whole society, it's the place where new developments start, where culture and intellect are concentrated. The city is the very centre of economical, cultural and social developments. In regards to the relevancy of being church, it is of great importance that the church functions adequately in urban society.

Using my sociological observations as base, I also give an evaluation of the practical situations. Hereby I ascertain that the urban sociological themes as mentioned previously (characteristics, areas and pioneer function of the city) do play a role in many different ways.

Strategy

In *chapter 8* I arrive at the final answering of the main question of my investigation. The interaction between church communities and the urban society occur on the cutting face of the functions of the church and the general characteristics of the cities. A matrix showing functions and characteristics does show this and generates twelve strategic fields of attention ('cells'). The bi-culturality of the church (an open [a1] and positive [a2], but also critical [b] attitude towards the city) demands hereby two key-words for every field of attention. In that way I come to the following survey of fields of attention or topics, which play a role in the development of a strategy for the functioning of church communities in an urban society:

(1) An expansive audience and intimate emphasis (preaching in connection with density: keywords *expansive* and *intimate*).

(2) When big and when small? (fellowship in connection with density: keywords *large* and *small scaled*).

(3) For everybody and from the heart (service in connection with density: keywords *general* and *from-the-heart*).

(4) A multiple listener-image and a multicultural antenna (preaching in connection with heterogeneity: keywords *manifold* and *solidary*).

(5) A mirror of the heterogeneity? (fellowship in connection with heterogeneity: keywords *varied* and *connected*).

(6) The ability to empathise (service in connection with heterogeneity: keywords *many-coloured* and *equal*).

(7) Much mobility, but also tranquillity (proclamation in connection with mobility: keywords *dynamic* and *balanced*).

(8) Coming and going (fellowship in connection with mobility: keywords *changeable* and *enduring*).

(9) Living a life in service (service in connection with mobility: keywords *brief* and *tenacious*).

(10) Fighting for attention and speaking clear language (proclamation in connection with complexity: keywords *diverse* and *clear*).

(11) Clear and well organised contact-practices (fellowship in connection with complexity: keywords *multifarious* and *transparent*).

(12) Accessible (show of) services (service in connection with complexity: keywords *complicated* and *accessible*).

In order to show the usability of the matrix showing functions and characteristics, I work out further the topics 8

and 6 which connect respectively pastorate and diaconate as activities of the church.

- *Changeable and enduring*

Topic 8 is the intersection where the characteristic mobility (city) and the function fellowship (church) meet.

(a1) *Mobility* and flexibility connect with changeability, because of that practice of the function *fellowship* is made more difficult, because *fellowship* is signified by belonging-together and staying-together because of a shared conviction of faith. However when the composition of a certain communion changes permanently, the aspect of belonging-together is constantly put under pressure. Nowadays one may notice that the constant coming and going of people has become a well-known phenomenon in the church communities of the big cities, through which the communities are confronted with by the *mobility* of the present urban society.

(a2) *Mobility* (flexibility) and *fellowship* are hard to combine. That's the reason why the church has to come up with much inventiveness in order to react adequately to the constant change of people and to be very flexible in the discovery of different kinds of communion practices, which are able to connect to the *mobility* of the urban society. That means for example that the church should be able to start a new group within a very short time. It could also be of great importance to divide the church of the city into a number of house-churches, which keep their own services on Sunday.

(b) In the same time the church must try to be enduring, exactly because of her function *fellowship*. The care of the church needs stability; belonging-together, based on shared faith, is not without responsibilities and will not be given up just like that. When regarding care for people, the church as *fellowship* wants to be characterized by loyalty.

- *Many-coloured and equal*

Topic 6 deals with the characteristic *heterogeneity* (city) in combination with the function *service* (church).



The Reformed Church in Venlo is one of the churches which is being prepared to be a "heart for the city" by the church association of the Reformed Churches (liberated).

(a1) When dealing with the service of the church, one may conclude that the *heterogeneity* of the urban society does result into many-colouredness. Having its aim on the society puts the church in touch with all kinds of people and (ethnic) groups.

(a2) It is important that the church can handle this and is able to use the many-colouredness in the actual putting into practice of her function *service*. This demands empathy and a positive attitude to service. The aspect of many-colouredness of the society demands variety in acts of charity and justice.

(b) In the same time the church should strive for equality regarding the approach and treatment of people and groups. The church gets to face more and more (claiming) inquiries for help. Within the concept of serving and helping, inequality is a definite trap for *heterogeneity*.

In *chapter 9* I finish off my investigation by mentioning a number of strategic recommendations for the functioning of church in the urban society. Certain directions regarding attitude, co-operation, city explorations and interaction are mentioned here.

- * Nevertheless, first and foremost stands the recommendation that it is of strategic importance that a church union invests into church communities of the cities because of the pioneer role of cities in the society. City churches are often pioneers when dealing with the issue of adequate functioning of the church in the society at large. This pioneer position must be honoured.
- * The attitude of the church over against the city is signified by three aspects: accepting (open attitude), honouring (positive attitude) and correcting (critical attitude).
- * Local, small city churches do not have enough people and resources available. This is the reason why city churches must co-operate with regards to the development of strategies aimed at their functioning in the urban society.
- * Local city churches have to analyse the urban society as being a context of their working field, they should do so with the aid of the characteristics of density, heterogeneity, mobility and complexity. They also should identify (by using the different areas of the city), research (by the significant characteristics of the city), and describe (based upon available local information concerning neighbourhoods of the city) their working field.
- * Local city churches are able to analyse their interaction with the urban society by means of the twelve strategic topics.

This study would like to contribute to all efforts of churches in the urban society to have as much as a 'heart for the city' as well as be a 'heart of the city'.

* P.W. van de Kamp, Hart voor de stad. Een praktisch-theologische studie naar kansen voor kerk-zijn in een stedelijke samenleving. Kampen 2003. *A heart for the city. A practical-theological investigation into opportunities for the church in an urban society.*

Judaism Is Not Jewish

After delivering a speech in Grand Rapids in 1986, Dr. H. Evan Runner accosted me - I think that's the correct term - apparently approving of what he had heard me say. "You're Jewish," he said. "I think you'll understand." He then grabbed me by the shoulders and proceeded to plant a kiss on each of my cheeks. I understood. I think Baruch Maoz will understand if I do the same to him when we (finally and hopefully) meet. For if, as the Scripture says, "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips" (Prov.24:26), surely 400 pages of called-for correction demands a couple of pecks!

The silence finally broken

And it's more than Rev. Maoz's honesty for which I'm grateful. It is for that wonderful "It's about time someone said this" sense which, based on the back-cover and inside first-page blurbs, quite a few of us Reformed folk have felt upon reading *Judaism Is Not Jewish*. From Joel Beeke to Richard Gaffin to John Armstrong, it is clear that many of us have been waiting for just what Baruch has to say regarding the so-called "Messianic Jewish Movement."



The cover of 'Judaism is not Jewish', by Baruch Maoz.



About the author:

Rev. Steve Schlissel (1953, Brooklyn) is since 1979 pastor of Messiah's Congregation, a reformed church in Brooklyn, New York (www.MessiahNYC.org).

More than a few seem to have felt as if only a Jewish Christian could have said what in this book is said. That is understandable, in a way, but it is wrong. Truth does not need to wait for a culturally approved vessel before it is uttered. Christian reluctance to decry Messianic Judaism is an example of culture calling the shots for the Church. Political Correctness seems to carry more clout than Holy Scripture in the governance of public polemical discourse among theologians today. This must have contributed to so-called Messianic Judaism being accorded a padded, if not protected, status.

Seeing how eagerly welcomed Baruch's book has been, one therefore cannot help but wonder if fear of being (irresponsibly) charged with anti-Semitism of a sort may not have kept some otherwise mighty pens capped. We all knew it was theologically problematic, if not moronic, but we feared simply to say so. Until now, thanks to Baruch. One can only hope, though, that his book is the beginning, not the end, of Messianic Jewish critique, for a great deal remains to be said, and some of what has been said needs to be nuanced or modified.

Why so deep a silence?

Of course, more than political correctness was at work in stifling criticism. We had also to deal with the recentness of the Holocaust; the complexity of Messianic Judaism's tie-in to Dispensationalism, to Pentecostalism (overall, Messianic Judaism might well be regarded as Pentecostalism with a yarmulke), and to Zionism; and these complications lived, moved and had their being in the company of a general failure of the Church in its mission to the Jews. This last factor may have contributed to an attitude that was quick to forgive serious weaknesses for, after all, at least Messianic Judaism appeared to work, i.e., it got Jews to profess Christ.

But the aforementioned are factors that refuse to be easily sorted, let alone squarely faced. Yet they seem together to account for a (statistically small but ecclesiologicaly pernicious) movement being granted a wider berth than many other problems on the doctrinal map. How tempting to give it a buy, to be reluctant to call it on the carpet. "Why attack Messianic Judaism?"

Baruch Maoz gives cogent reasons to do just that. For example, despite strong denials by adherents, Messianic Judaism is a threat to the unity for which Christ gave His life

(John 17), and of which Paul spoke in Ephesians, especially Chapters 2 and 4. Pastor Maoz vocalizes what all who are familiar with the movement know to be so-Gentiles are treated as second-class citizens.

It looks like Jewish

This forms one of the greatest ironies of the movement, for it is composed largely, if not mainly, of Gentiles. And herein we touch upon a point treated too lightly, if not “passed over”: the profound fraud at the heart of this movement. Hypocrisy is indexed twice in this book and both occasions deal with hypocrisy among non-Christian Jews (a la Matthew 23, etc.). But at least as offensive is the hypocrisy of non-Jewish Christians posing as Jews within Messianic Judaism. Mention is made by Maoz of the confusion, the embarrassment, of Gentiles donning prayer shawls and yarmulkes in a vain effort to appear Jewish. Far worse is the pretended Jewishness of Messianic leaders.

The once-successful and enjoyable Messianic singing duo, Lamb, was made up of two Gentiles. Rick Coghill, Gentile on both sides, added “Levi” as a middle name. The lead singer, Joel Chernoff-whose father was a Messianic pastor, and whose brother served as president of a Messianic association-was the son of a Gentile woman, making him a Gentile, according to the definition of Rabbinic Judaism. In an effort at camouflage, the mom changed her given name to Yohanna, a common practice in Messianic circles. Miriam Nadler, wife of the former New York City Jews for Jesus director, was born Mary Ann, an apparently unacceptable name. It was standard practice for Jews for Jesus staff to change names in order to sound more “authentically” Jewish. Moishe Rosen himself was really Martin Rosen. Tuvye Zaretsky, now director of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism, was born with the very goyishe name of Carson Miles!

One of the most prominent Messianic leaders in the world today is Dan Juster, a really nice guy. But you will never hear it mentioned, unless you ask, that “Rabbi” Juster’s mother is a Gentile, making him, too, a goy according to Judaism’s standard. The only Jewish way out of this dilemma would be to convert to Judaism, which would involve, for Christians, the unhappy problem of renouncing Christ.

Thus we find that a sober assessment of the Messianic Jewish movement necessarily leads us to the unhappy position of taking sides with Jewish anti-missionary organizations and rabbis who denounce Messianic Jews as less than honest. They are correct. It is far, far better to say you are a Christian and that you believe all Jews ought to be Christians, than it is to pretend to be a Jew when you are not. Christians, even Jewish Christians, are distinct from non-Christian Jews, no matter how many observances Jewish Christians might retain. Jesus came with a sword, and it still cuts, still divides. Those who have been made Christian by God should make that clear to those they love.

Too much room for heresy

Judaism Is Not Jewish is subtitled A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement. My main critique of the book is that it



...May/ought Jewish Christian households, for example, post mezuzahs on their doorways...? A mezoeza is a small cylindrical metal roll (often copper or bronze, but also sandstone) containing a small scroll upon which the words ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one’, the confession of the Jews, is written. This was to be nailed or screwed onto the doorpost.

is a bit too friendly. Brother Baruch, for example, would have done well to more thoroughly chronicle just how widespread and deep a problem anti-Trinitarianism has become in the movement. Though he does mention and treat of this glaring problem, Maoz does not bluntly characterize it as a fatal flaw, which it is.

For many of us, this is the decisive issue, making Messianic Judaism a heretical movement beyond redemption. If any movement is to be recognized as credible, it must police itself at the level of adherence to the universal Christian creeds. They must be ostracized by their own who would dare tamper with non-negotiables of the Faith. Messianic Judaism does not do this, thus putting itself outside the pale of Christendom. The Trinity is an article which “except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved,” as the Athanasian Creed puts the matter. Yet anti-Trinitarian publications have advertised in “mainstream” Messianic periodicals. Even when, in one case, the ads were no longer accepted, no public apology was offered. Trinitarianism is increasingly commonly spoken of among Messianics as a “Hellenically-induced” addition to the faith, and the full deity of Jesus Christ is, of late, tolerated as if it were a debatable topic.

To be Christian and to stay Jewish

The book might have done well to deal more thoroughly with the thorny questions of culture and its implication for mission to the Jews, though what is said is, in the main, fair enough. It's just that the question—so often wrestled with by responsible missiologists, especially in the last fifty years—concerning the relationship of culture to evangelism, does involve a unique set of questions when applied to Jewish evangelization. Jews are the only people whose culture alleges to be rooted in the Bible.

Contrary to the assertion often made by well-meaning theologians, the Jews really are a special case.

Thus for Jewish converts, numerous—in some cases seemingly countless—observances must be examined as to motivation and social place before the propriety of their post-conversion continuity may be properly addressed. May/ought Jewish Christian households, for example, post mezuzahs on their doorways? Maoz thinks not (p.157), arguing that such a practice is representative of the spirit of “Rabbinic legalism” which “has destroyed the spirit of the Law and rendered it ineffective.”

I disagree, but only mention it here as an instance of the difficulty which attaches itself to the sorting of the cultural from the religious in things Jewish. Which practices are helpful, which harmful, which tend toward profit, which toward futility, which ought to be classed under *adiaphora*? I'm aware of no other people-group for whom these questions are so pervasive, and sometimes so thorny. Sometimes Jewish converts are assailed for continuing to celebrate even a severely modified Passover Seder, and just as often they are envied by Christians for having among their cherished traditions one which speaks so powerfully of the Christ. If they continue to observe a Seder after conversion, some find them suspect; if they have no Seder at all, some find them pitiable.

The essence of Maoz's criticism

However, Maoz is correct in his core criticism asserting that the Judaism to which “Messianic” Judaism appeals is extra-Biblical Judaism, sometimes even anti-Biblical Judaism. Nothing but confusion could flow from a movement that simply does not know where it has tossed its anchor. And it is this criticism which makes Maoz merit a peck on each cheek.



A (to scale) model of the temple

But if his book suffers from a weakness, it is this: it doesn't level an attack quite in keeping with what is warranted by the threat Messianic Judaism poses. And it is a threat not only for its having come to us associated with the “-isms” before mentioned, but for its fundamental dishonesty and its increasingly unabashed heretical tendencies. It is a movement built on the less-than-sandy foundation of anachronisms, fraud, guile and error.

Judaism Is Not

Jewish is a fine primer on much that is inherently wrong with

Messianic Judaism. Maoz knows from whence he speaks. As a minister serving in Israel for more than thirty years, Baruch knows that Messianic Judaism, when greatly restrained, can have some missiological value. But he also knows that Messianic Judaism does not take kindly to being restrained. It moves in an errant direction as a compass points northward, under compulsion. For it arises out of a fundamental confusion concerning that very matter which differentiates the two overarching covenantal administrations revealed in Scripture, viz., the full inclusion of Gentiles in the commonwealth of Israel (Eph.2). And it appeals for justification of many of its practices to a brand of Judaism which arose as a self-conscious effort to continue the Jewish religion without Temple, Priesthood or sacrifice, and most of all, without the Messiah of God.

Because Messianic Judaism is so thoroughly hopeless as a legitimate Christian expression, one can only thank God that Baruch Maoz has had the wisdom and courage to level his cogent critique. He plainly states, “The Messianic Movement seems to have outlived its usefulness.” Because that is so, we hope that this book is the first of several which would together serve to expose this movement until we may bid a fond farewell.

Review of:

Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is not Jewish*. A friendly critique of the Messianic Movement, Fearn (Great Britain): Christian Focus / Mentor (ISBN 1 85792 7877; Price : £10.99; Pages :400; information for ordering the book at <http://www.christianfocus.com>), 2003.

NEWS UPDATE

Divorce and remarriage in the Reformed Churches (Liberated)

Recently, the booklet *Echtscheiding en hertrouwen?* appeared, a more popular edition of the report about divorce to the General Synod of Zuidhorn, 2002-2003. The complete title: *Divorce and remarriage? Impulse for a new approach to divorce, discipline and remarriage*. It has now also been translated into English. The English version has not appeared in book form but has been placed on the internet. The purpose of this publication is to support church council reflection and discussion within churches about questions relevant to marriage and remarriage.

Commission and intention

The General Synod of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands, which met in 2002 in Zuidhorn, instructed deputies "to stimulate reflection within the churches with regard to marriage, being single, preparation for marriage, questions surrounding divorce as well as the point and status of church solemnisation".

In order to stimulate this reflection, amongst other things, deputies were commissioned to write a booklet. The booklet *Divorce and remarriage?* is a shorter, more widely readable version of the report which was discussed at the General Synod of Zuidhorn. The synod discussions have also been worked into the booklet. It is being presented as a study report within the churches. Deputies would also like to involve churches outside of the Netherlands in this wider reflection process. For this reason, the booklet has been translated into English and placed on internet. Deputies would like to receive reactions from the churches before March 1st 2004 at the latest, via email. They would like to include these reactions into the report to the next General Synod, which should take place in the spring of 2005 in Amersfoort, the Lord willing.

Contents

The booklet does not only deal exclusively with biblical information which directly refers to marriage and divorce. The teaching of Jesus Christ about the coming Kingdom is central. Within this context, following Him, also as far as marriage is concerned, is spoken of. Here, attention is also given to our cultural context, in which that following must take place.

Continuation

The deputies hope to stimulate discussion about Christlikeness within the churches, via this booklet. A number of areas which are not thoroughly dealt with in this booklet, will be discussed at the next General Synod. In this way, the deputies are working towards a proposal with regard to remarriage after divorce. Attention will also be given to the role of church discipline. Likewise, prevention and preparation for marriage will receive more attention.

Availability

The text of *Divorce and remarriage?* can be downloaded from the internet: www.gkv.nl. As booklet it is exclusively available in Dutch via Riemer and Walinga bookshop in Groningen ([groningen@riemer-walinga.nl](mailto: groningen@riemer-walinga.nl)). The price is 4 Euros per copy, excl. postage.

Reactions

Reactions to the contents of this booklet can be sent preferably via email, to the secretary of the Deputies for Marriage and Divorce: Ir. K. Mulder, De Meesterproef 22, 3813 GL Amersfoort, The Netherlands; email: huwelijkscheiding@gkv.nl.

Source:

Deputies for Marriage and Divorce of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands, K. Mulder Secretary

Nederlands Dagblad 60 years old

In 2004, the *Nederlands Dagblad* celebrated its 60th jubilee. The newspaper appeared for the first time as weekly paper *Reformatiestemmen* (Reformation Voices) on 3rd September 1944. The periodical, *De Vrije Kerk* (The Free Church) came out on November 2nd 1945. These two papers merged on 17th January 1946 and became known on 15th April 1948, as the *Gereformeerde Gezinsblad* (Reformed Family Paper). Since 1968, the paper has been known as the *Nederlands Dagblad* (Dutch Daily), with the



(photo: Nederlands Dagblad)

subtitle *Reformed morning paper for the Christian Netherlands*. The subtitle recently changed into 'christelijk betrokken' (Involved in a Christian way).

The chosen theme for the jubilee year is to be "Sixty years of reporting everyday reality" This was consistent with the aim and vision of the newspaper : showing God's reality to the people of every day. This means that the paper strives to produce pure news coverage with thorough background information and opinion forming articles, from a Christian point of view.

The paper wants very much to use this jubilee year to strengthen its ties with the public. Philip Veldhuizen from the Promotion department: 'Maintaining subscriptions is our highest priority. We feel greatly blessed with our subscriptions. Growth is increasing on a small scale and we still have a small profit margin. And that in the sort of economical times, which make it hard for some papers to survive'. For the children there will be an Elly and Rikkert concert, there will be opportunity for readers to travel to America, a congress about journalism, a high tea in Palace Het Loo in Apeldoorn, a Clou -festival for the youth (Clou is the weekly paper for young people), a celebration of the Christian book, a walking relay. On October 9th 2004, there will be a day for readers in Barneveld in the Veluwehal'.

Source:

Nederlands Dagblad, 19th September 2003

De Brug: new Old Testament Explanation

A new series of commentaries on Old Testament books is to appear in the Netherlands. The publisher responsible is Groen, Heerenveen, of Jongbloed Leeuwarden. The intention is that the Bible explanation builds a bridge between the original meaning and the modern Bible reader. For this reason, the chosen title is 'De Brug' (the Bridge). In total, 15 volumes will appear. Recently the Jeremiah commentary was presented (dr. H. Lalleman-te Winkel). The Isaiah section (M.A. Buitink-Heijblom) is in preparation.

The publisher: "the series is especially directed to those who perceive the Bible to be a revelation from God and thus who want to see it as reliable and authoritative". Prof. J.P. Lettinga, retired Professor of Semitic languages of the Reformed (Liberated) Theological University in Kampen and one of the four editors, speaks of "an evangelical-reformed line of approach". According to him, the series is comparable with the well known "Korte Verklaring", and much more limited in its intention than the New Testament Commentary which is appearing since 1987, edited by Dr. J. van Bruggen. The reader will not be expected to know Hebrew.

The professors H.G.L. Peels of the Christian Reformed theological University in Apeldoorn, and G. Kwakkel en W.H. Rose of Kampen, are also involved with this publication. Dr. G.W. Lorein is chief editor.

Source:

Nederlands Dagblad 19th September 2003

Celebrations in Manipur

by Ben Bolt



Eating together. It looks like the feeding of the five thousand! (photo: Ben Bolt)

The Reformed Presbyterian Churches in North East India (RPCNEI) celebrated their Silver Jubilee on the 21st and 22nd February 2004. They really celebrated! Many songs were prepared for the occasion, and many speeches. Their gratitude to the Lord was intense. There was also much food prepared. On the first day of the celebration, the "kitchen" catered for three thousand people. The kitchen was the football pitch where long trenches were dug and filled with firewood. Pans and pans of rice and meat were prepared there! We ate together, squatting down on the football pitch.

In the morning assembly, we, Ben and Gini Bolt, greeted them on behalf of the churches in the Netherlands, and as a remembrance and confirmation of our relationship, we presented them with a plaque bearing the BBK and DVN logos.

The relationship with the sister churches in the Netherlands exists since 1999. Over the years a deep attachment has been formed. The RPCNEI was instituted in the federal state of Manipur as a consequence of the secession from the Evangelical Assembly Church. It began in the mountains with one congregation and two ministers. Since her establishment, thanks to

missionary work, the RPCNEI in Manipur and in neighbouring Assam, has grown considerably. No end to that growth is in sight.

The yearly synod was held prior to the Jubilee celebrations. One unusual point on the agenda was the request from the small church association in the State of Tripura to be admitted to the RPCNEI. In 2003, 10 instituted churches in Tripura grouped themselves together, took on the name Reformed Presbyterian Church and requested affiliation. The RPC board in Manipura has twice sent a mission to scrutinise these. They reported back positively. Four ministers from this group were present to explain their request. These ministers have been intensely busy in the mountain region of Tripura over the last ten years.

It was thus, a special moment when the synod at Manipura granted these brothers from Tripura their request and so included them within their sister churches. On the following Sunday, the four ministers were officially installed within the RPCNEI. It was an emotional moment, seeing these four brothers on their knees before God and His church, promising faithfulness.

The Reformed Presbyterian Churches in North East India consist of 49 congregations and 8400 members. This has doubled since 1998. Given the amazing missionary zeal, we may well expect that in the coming years, this growth shall continue. This comment made by a minister in Tripura, speaks volumes: "we have yet much work to be done, within our tribe there is 20% which is not yet Christian!"



A few women dressed in the traditional costume of the Mar-tribe in Manipur. (photo: Ben Bolt)

God's Spirit Works

by Sue Wierenga-Tucker

God's Presence was the theme of the second conference organised by the Reformed (liberated) workgroup based in Zwolle, called *God's Spirit Works*.

The first day in May 2003, attracted approximately 1600 visitors. The second, May 2004, attracted more than 2000. Massive sport hall, flashing lights, hands in the air. Times are changing.

At least, the forms are changing. Not so long ago it would have been unthinkable for many Reformed Christians to praise God with the enthusiasm so clearly manifested here. On the podium, were drums and guitars, keyboard, mouth organ, and saxophone, accompanying the song leaders. Dance too, was given its place.

The *Nederlands Dagblad (Dutch Daily)* called these "evangelical forms of expression". I think that would be narrowing things down a bit too much. As new as these forms may be for many Reformed believers, I cannot help but think that there is nothing new under the sun.

Take a look at Psalm 149:

*Let Israel rejoice in their maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp."*

And then Psalm 150:

*“Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!”*

And while were at it, look at Psalm 134:

*“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
And bless the Lord.”*

I am really only scratching the surface here. Some things do stay the same. The central message, the call to turn to God, to rid your life of the things that stand in the way, the call to take the burden to God and leave it there! The speakers were Rev. Jos Douma (Haarlem) and Rev. Gert Hutten (Franeker). There must be many less valuable ways to spend a Saturday than to listen to these two enthusiastic young ministers. The growth of Hutten's church in Franeker (Friesland) is something of a wonder in itself...but that is another story..

Jos Douma spoke about asking. If you do not ask you cannot expect to receive. Moses, having come down from the mountain, already being in a peculiar relationship with God, asked for more. He asked to see God's glory. And God granted his request! Exodus 33. Gert Hutten talked about intimacy with God - what could possibly be more intimate than God dwelling in you through His Spirit?! And yet do we always give Him the room He wants? Do we not try to serve Him as though we can really do it ourselves?

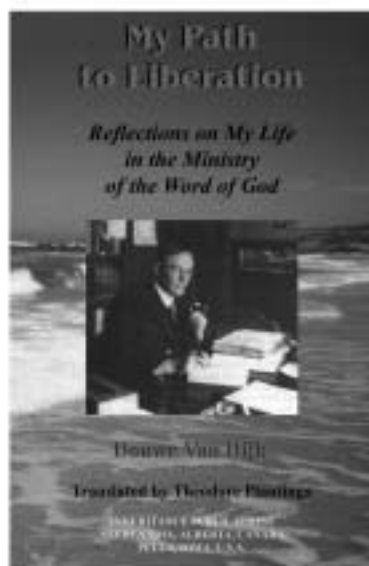
Every visitor took a card home with them. This prayer was printed on the card:

*Lord,
Your love is the greatest gift in my life.
Let me long for it, let me keep asking you with frankness, for more...more of you in my life, more faith, more trust, use my life to your ends.
Show me my faults and shortcomings.
Teach me, Father, to bear fruit.
Take me completely, my time, my energy, my money.
Make me a useful instrument in your hand.
Do not let me keep any piece of my heart hidden from you.
Make me tender hearted and loving towards the people around me.
Above all, Lord, give me love for you.
This love is the secret of my life.
Father let me be a light in this dark world.
Let Jesus be the centre of my life.
Only then can I grow and blossom.
As a bud changes into a magnificent flower -
As a butterfly crawls out of its cocoon and with bright colours, is set free in all its glory -
So may I open up for you, Lord.
Fill me every day anew with your Spirit.
That he may lead me on my way.
That he may teach me how I can deepen my relationship with you.
Let Jesus be the Way to you.
And teach me to live in the light of Eternity.
Amen.*

More info:
see www.godsgeestwerkt.com



An illustration taken from the website
www.godsgeestwerkt.com



My Path to Liberation by Douwe Van Dijk

Reflections on My Life in the Ministry of the Word of God

J. Bruning in *Una Sancta* of August 7, 2004: . . . In short, Rev van Dijk provides you with a realistic picture of the Church and its struggles, and encouragement to deal with current issues in a Scriptural and Church orderly manner. Let me give you a slice of Rev van Dijk's book and whet your appetite to read the entire book which will be very rewarding indeed. . . . Rev van Dijk also deals with many other practical aspects of church life. Examples include, mutual support, home visits, evangelisation, attending church services away from your home congregation, humility, life in the theological college and the struggles in the manse. I learned much from this book. Although written in a personal and easy style, it is a treasure for (future) office bearers and very educational for all who love the church. From time to time we hear the phrase "we have a rich Reformed heritage". This book definitely conveys some aspects of this heritage and will enrich you; it will also arm you. The book is well translated and suffers very little from "Dutchisms". It is highly recommended and available at your local church book store.

Time: 1890-1960
ISBN 0-921100-26-4

Age: 16-99
Can.\$19.95 U.S.\$16.90

A Theatre in Dachau by Hermanus Knoop

Rev. Jerome Julien in *The Outlook*, Those dreadful years of Nazi oppression in The Netherlands are catalogued here in an amazing way. Not only Jews, but faithful ministers of God's Word were touched, too. And from the caldron of torture the Lord received some of His servants to Himself: Revs. Kapteyn, Sietsma, and Tunderman. Others came through it, refined in God's crucible. . . The beauty of this book is found in the constant Christian testimony found in it. It is more than an account of atrocity; it is his personal reactions as a firmly founded believer to whom the Holy Spirit continued to apply God's marvellous Word. Every believer should read this little volume. This reviewer could hardly put it down because it is so moving.

Time: 1940-1943
ISBN 0-921100-20-5

Age: 14-99
Can.\$14.95 U.S.\$12.90



The Dort Study Bible

An English translation of the Annotations to the Dutch Staten Bijbel of 1637 in accordance with a decree of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619

Rev. G.R. Procee in *The Messenger*: For many generations our fathers in The Netherlands treasured a beautiful Bible commentary that was present in nearly every home. This commentary consisted of marginal notes that were printed with the text of the Dutch States Bible of 1637 (Staten Bijbel met Kanttekeningen). These marginal notes have been widely used in the Dutch churches for centuries with much edification. They are still in print today and are considered to be a very reliable Reformed explanation of God's Word. Those of us who know the Dutch and are somewhat familiar with these marginal notes will readily agree that the quality of these annotations is excellent.

Vol. 1 Genesis - Exodus ISBN 1-894666-51-8 Can.\$24.95 U.S.\$18.90
Vol. 2 Leviticus - Deuteronomy ISBN 1-894666-52-6 Can.\$24.95 U.S.\$18.90

J. Geertsema in *Clarion*: I thank the publisher, and congratulate ourselves and our global English speaking brotherhood with this second, revised, publication of the Annotations in the English language, now in a modern format. I sure wish and hope that this book too will find many buyers, and that this first volume with Genesis and Exodus will be followed by all the other books of the Bible.

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**Colour brings out in full relief
– by means of slanting beams –
the map of all the world.
Increasingly far-reaching is the Light!
Over the quarters It will claim
an ever larger territory;
each corner of the earth
must yield to it ultimately.**

**The hands of the clock in God's hand
mark the Light's feats of conquest on earth
until in the fulness of time
every one of the four winds of heaven
shall be filled with the glory of the Lamb.**

Lux Mundi: Light shining upon this world.

*This cover was made according to the design
of J.P. Gootjes from Zwolle.*